

Transcripts

SECTION: Goals/Benefits

Section Content: Why Independent Reading

Why is Independent Reading Important in primary classrooms?

Denise N. Morgan, Professor of Literacy Education, Kent State University

Independent reading I think is the foundation of really allowing kids to practice reading. In order to get good at anything, you have to read, and IR is the structure within the school day that carves out dedicated time so that kids can actually do the very thing we want them to do, and read. There's so much that teachers feel compelled that they need to do, that sometimes the simplest thing, and the thing that we know is most important – that they actually spend time reading – gets discounted so we can do all these other things about reading. But really when it comes down to it, you only get good at doing something because you actually get the chance to practice it.

My favorite analogy is thinking about how children learn to swim. So if I were to tell you that I have the perfect swim teacher for your child, and that you don't even have to worry about getting a new bathing suit for your child, you would be like, that makes no sense. No, no, don't worry about it, the teacher is going to have the child sit, and hold her breath outside the pool, and then we're going to practice these arm strokes outside the pool, and we'll even learn how to kick outside the water, you would say, "Absolutely not, I'm not signing up." And yet unfortunately, sometimes in the teaching of reading, people think kids need to know all these parts. So they need to know how to do the arm movements, or they need to know how to kick their legs or hold their breath, without actually reading. So you learn to swim, and you learn all of these things in the act of being in the water. And you learn all these parts about reading in the act of reading. So it matters that kids have dedicated, daily time to read.

One of the reasons why IR is so important, is that traditionally a teacher has a single textbook, or basal, to use with the entire class. So even though you have a first grade class, you have kids who are barely reading, and you have kids who are reading way beyond that grade level. And any one basal never has enough reading material for the students, nor do they have it at the appropriate level. So that's why IR really allows the teacher to help each individual student move forward as a reader, because you're finding texts that that child can read, and we're also going with volume, and that also develops stamina, and there's never enough reading to ever be done in a basal alone.

I would tell teachers to just try it. It can be the absolute greatest joy of your day. Kids involved in books, and then your job as the teacher is to go talk to the kids about those books. And when you do that, you develop these wonderful relationships, and insights, and sometimes shared jokes that you don't get in other ways.

Irby DuBose, Kindergarten Teacher, Pate Elementary School, Darlington, SC

Well, I try to teach my children, and I think we're doing a good job, that independent reading is a sacred time, a valued time. They love it. They come to miss it if we don't have it for some reason. If we go on a field trip they come back and say, why didn't we go to independent reading? As a teacher myself, I don't know how I could build my children without having that independent reading time. I think it's a great time where they practice strategies, it's a great time where they build confidence as readers, because you think about their guides and folders are all designed to fit their specific needs as readers. So they're comfortable. They have access to what's appropriate for them. So I think building that confidence, hey I can do this, that's what I strive to do during independent reading that trickles into the rest of their day. At the end of the day, I want my children to go home and feel successful. I don't want them to feel like they've been beat up on because they can't do something or they're not good enough. So why I love independent reading is because it's so easy to change and tailor to fit the needs of your children.

I think with each class I have the same goals, I want them to all be engaged, proficient readers. I want them to take the strategies we do in small group and do them when they're reading by themselves. The whole point is that I give them strategies and then they do them by themselves and become more proficient readers. So each year, I have to get to know them as readers. What do they like, what are they good at, what can they do naturally as readers.

Apryl Whitman, Grade 1 Teacher, Meadowfield Elementary School, Columbia, SC (Richland 1)

It gives children the time to practice the skills that I'm teaching. It also gives the time for me to meet with the students one on one, and it's the time I can meet with small groups to reinforce the strategies that I've taught during my mini-lessons. I feel that children are more excited about what they're doing and engaged in what they're doing when they have choice, whether it's choosing their own book to read or their own poem to read, they have ownership of what they're doing. It's not me telling them to go do this, it's what I want to do, I want to dive deeper into it. That's what we do as readers. We get to choose what we want to read and get excited about.

Christy Long, Grade 2 Teacher, Inman Elementary School, Inman, SC (Spartanburg 1)

It's important because #1, I want them to learn to love reading, and learn to love having the quiet time and sit and read what they want to read, and just enjoy reading. Everything they do in life is going to involve reading, and I want them to be readers, and to be able to read for enjoyment, and not just for homework, or not just for an assignment. So I think that's one of the most important things that independent reading time gives them. And I've also shared with them how precious our time is during the day, and I only have so many hours to teach them so many things, and so I'm giving you this whole 45 minutes, and you use that to be a better reader. We talk about, if you want to be a better basketball player, you have to practice. You 're not going to just wake up and be better one day. So if you want to be a better reader, let's work on it, let's work on it together.

And they're definitely growing in their confidence, especially some of the lower level readers, and they're choosing the books on their levels, and they're choosing the books that they're interested in. Those are all things I had to teach them to do. So I'm seeing their levels are moving up, and just the fact that they're thinking about what they're reading, that's impressed me, and how they're asking the questions of their friends, that shows me that they're also thinking as they're listening to someone talk about their book.

I think they look forward to that independent reading time. It's at the end of our day, and they're tired by then, and they look forward to it and it's something that they want to do. Like my one student said, she said "I get some quiet time." I love that, yes, we all need some quiet time.

Inman Elementary Second Graders

S: When you read a lot of chapter books and stuff, that'll get you into the harder reading levels, and the harder words.

S: I like it because I can have some time to myself and read good books.

S: It's because it helps you, you used to not know how to read, but it helps you more, to read better than you used to read. Like if your little sister can't read, you can teach her if you know how to read you can teach them better.

S: Sometimes like I help my cousin when he's finished working and I'll help him speak English and read.

S: I love reading because it makes you get smarter.

Pate Elementary Kindergarten Students (S= Student, T= Teacher)

S: You can do great fluency on your books. Don't look at anybody else's books or nobody's book. You can just read fluency to help you read like a good writer or good reader.

T: How do you feel when you're doing independent reading?

S: Happy

T: Why?

S: Because I like independent reading.

T: Why?

S: I like it because I love it so so so so much.

T: Why do you love it so so so so much?

S: Because I like to read and I like to draw and I like to read the picture and the words.

S: You have to look at your own book because if you look at somebody else's book, it will make you not concentrate, and when you're done reading, you can't read that well.

S: I talked about you have to do something in your brain.

T: And how do you feel when you do stuff in your brain?

S: Just fine.

T: Just fine.

S: I was saying when we read our books, and you messed up, you can go back to the start when you want. And if you can't read your book, you can just look at the pictures.

S: I learned about when independent readers get out their books and start reading and they take their books, look at the title and figure it out.

T: Thank you. (Clapping) Do you all like independent reading?

S: Yes!

T: You do! I love to read. (child puts thumbs up and so does teacher)

Section Content: Success Criteria

What are the most important ingredients to make Independent Reading Time effective?

Linda B. Gambrell, Distinguished Professor of Education, Clemson University

We really want children to choose to read and the motivation research suggests that there are a number of critical factors. Access, choice, challenge, and collaboration are 4 constructs that are really important in helping children choose to read.

First of all, you have to establish the setting. If you want children to read, at home or in the classroom, you have to have lots of good books at lots of different levels, so that children are not only choosing books that they're really interested in reading, but so they have the opportunity to select books that they can read. So having that access is really important. You have to have books if you want to develop readers.

Choice is another thing that's important because we know from our experiences as teachers and from the research that children are more likely to read and become engaged in books if they're books that they have selected. So having lots of books so children can select books that they're interested in is critical.

Collaboration – one of the most motivating things in getting children to read is letting them talk about what they've read. We're all social by nature, and anybody who's ever read a really great book will tell you that one of the things that they wanted to do as soon as they finished is tell their friends about the great book that they just read. Sharing what you've just read is important both in terms of learning and remembering and thinking about the book, but it's also very motivating. As children talk to each other, what we find is that they want to read the books that they hear about.

And challenge is also an important construct, because children like to feel like they are doing really good work, that they are reading challenging things. One of the stories I like to tell is about a teacher I worked with early in my career, and she was teaching first grade, and she had 3 bookshelves. She had developed her classroom library and she had organized her books so that the children could choose from these books, so she had easy books, average books, and hard books. What she found with her first graders was that none of them wanted to read the easy books. Even the struggling readers would not touch the books on the easy shelf. So after Xmas break, she came back and she relabeled the bookshelves – hard, harder, and hardest. And what she found was that the children didn't mind going and picking out a hard book, but even first grade children want to be viewed as doing challenging work. They don't want to be seen as doing the easy stuff. So we want to challenge our readers and one of the most important ways that teachers challenge children is through individual conferences about what they've read. You might not be able to conference with every child every week, but most teachers can organize so that in some way they do a quick, 3-5 minute conference with children every couple of weeks about what they're reading. This is a time for teachers to give children that nudge; have you read this book? Here's another book that I think you would be interested in, challenging them to take on more and more challenging and interesting books to read. Children love to have their teacher pay attention to what they're doing. So classroom conferences with children have a big payoff in terms of motivation.

Irby DuBose, Apryl Whitman, and Christy Long

Ms. Dubose: I definitely think having enough books that the students are interested in, and having enough books that the child can read, developmentally appropriate texts for the children. I think if they have books that are interesting, and on their level, and they have enough of them, then they'll stay engaged in IR. And as long as their time limit is appropriate for the age that you teach. 2:26 We're really big on making sure they're interested in what they're reading, and making sure they have books they can read.

Ms. Whitman: First of all, having enough literature and a wide variety of it, especially leveled texts that they're able to read on their own that's not too difficult. So having a variety of leveled texts and you've heard me say 'look books' – books that they just choose on their own that aren't leveled. That would be the first thing. The second thing is making sure I have consistent routines and procedures. If there are not consistent routines that go on, then that time that I have with children 1-1, it's not going to happen. So – materials and routines.

Ms. Long: One thing is just to explain to them like I said how precious their time is during the day, and I'm giving them this time to let's use it wisely. Let's not waste your time while you're here, let's do some learning and let's get ready for third grade. If you just sit, if you're just watching for Ms. Long to see if she's watching, and then you look at your book, you're not helping anyone and you're not helping yourself. So that's one of the main things I try to get across at the beginning of the year, and that tends to help with their attitude about it. One other very important part is procedures. I spend a lot of time in the beginning of the year working on procedures.

Section Content: Home and Summer Extensions

How can we encourage independent reading at home?

Linda B. Gambrell

I think there are important ways that teachers can encourage children to read during the school year and during the summer at home. One of the things that I did when I first started teaching, I'm embarrassed to say, is I didn't let children take their library books, the classroom library books, home. I was so afraid that they would leave them home and I wouldn't have enough books in my classroom library. But if you step back and think about it, what you really want to encourage and support is children reading. Instead of doing that, as I taught a number of years, I saw how important it was to allow children to take those books home. I went from not allowing the children to take the classroom library books home, to encouraging them to do so. One of the things I would do was to say, "Be sure you have a good book to take home. You may have to go with your mother somewhere and you can read in the back of the car. If you have a few minutes at home you can read on the school bus, there is all kinds of times of the day where you might want to have a good book in your backpack." So as I said goodbye to them, I always had them hold up the book to show me what they were taking home. So every day they took a book home. So I went from one extreme to another. So that's one way you can encourage children even during the school year to increase the volume of reading they do at home.

Irby DuBose, Apryl Whitman, Christy Long

Ms. DuBose: We talk about how you get better at reading by reading, so I think reading at home is the biggest thing they can do to be better readers. They can read at school, but if they're not reading at home – they really need both. So we do a reading log every month. They have to read 20-25 books, and if you turn it in at the end of the month you get a pizza – we have little Book-It coupons, and you get a pizza. That is a good motivator for some children. Some need a little more than just pizza. But we send home books every week that the children pick and we try to give them books that are on their level so they have access to books, because a lot of them struggle with not really having access to books to read at home. Then they get one library book each week. So really they have 5 books each week. So if they read the books we send home, they're good to go for the reading log and the pizza. 17:38 But I want them to feel like, they're doing all this reading at school, but it's not just at school, you need to do it at home too. They really need to make that connection. So it's not necessarily a minutes type of thing – I don't say read so many minutes each night; just sit down and read. I think it's more of a scheduling thing, like when you get home trying to find time to just sit down and read. I know it's hard. It's hard as an adult to do it. So I guess my thing is not necessarily giving it minutes but hey, just find some time when you can sit down and read with your child, and most of them are really receptive to it.

I guess the thing is trying to make sure they find the books that make them feel like reading is fun. If I just sent home books that they're not interested in, they're never going to really get turned on to reading. So like one parent told me her child really liked dinosaurs, so we tried to make sure we sent home some dinosaur books, making sure they have books that they really enjoy at home and at school, which is a challenge, because as you know, that takes a lot of books. We do the best we can.

Ms. Whitman: They have a Monday-Thursday reading log. It's very simple. I ask that the students write down the title of the book and the parents sign it. There's a book bag that goes home that they have that contract with, and there are 4 leveled texts in there and their library book. I push it with parents, they understand my expectation for that reading at home. They actually really enjoy it. They say that it gives them that time to see what their kids can do at home. And then I just randomly reward, if kids are bringing back their reading logs, one week I might give out Pizza Hut certificates, one week I might give out lollipops, they don't know, so it keeps them kind of on their toes and accountable for doing it.

Ms. Long: At home we ask that they read at least one book or one chapter each night, and if they have a night – like Wednesday night they have church and things are rushed, or Thursday night they have ball practice, on Friday your reading log is going to be due, so just try to read two books or two chapters a night, so you are getting practice at home. We talk about if you want to be a better gymnast, you have to go to gymnastics practice. You have to set time apart; it's not going to just happen. So you have to practice, and get yourself ready for third grade, because I can't do it for you. They just have a log, where they write down the date, the book title, and if it was too easy, or too hard or just right. That way I can keep track of are they really reading at home.

Interviewer (Ms. Durham): Do the parents sign it or anything?

Ms. Long: No, because at our school, a lot of parents don't have time or some of them may not care if their child is reading or not, because they don't know the importance of it. Parents are busy. I know

that first hand. Sometimes I will forget about my own child's homework. Oh, did you do your homework? OK, we're getting it. Is there anything I need to sign? Parents get busy. We all have things on our minds and I understand that. Sometimes I've had parents who will make excuses for their children not reading at home. They'll say, "It's my fault. I get busy and I can't sit down and read with them." Well, we talk about it in class, they don't have to sit with Mom to read. You can sit with her while she's cooking and you can read as she's cooking dinner, or anything like that. You can copy a title onto your own reading log, that's fine. So if mama's busy, or if mama's working second shift, or if the babysitter doesn't care, then you can take control of your own learning. You're a second grader and you can do those things. Once my kids know that I'm not going to accept their parents' excuse for them not being able to do it, and I put that back on the child, on the student, and they say, oh, OK, really I'm just going to have to do this.

How can we encourage independent reading during the summer?

Linda B. Gambrell

Over the summer is a big, big issue. Right now there is a lot of attention being paid to what is called the Summer Reading Loss or Summer Reading Slide. James Kim, Dick Allington, Anne Marie Franzen have all done wonderful research to show that this is a situation where every summer, children who struggle with reading fall behind. What happens with your average and above average readers is that during the school year they make progress, and over the summer, they spend time reading, so they move ahead, while the struggling reader moves back. So they don't start off in the same place in the fall. So over a number of years, they lag more and more behind, which becomes an increasingly severe problem as they go up the grade levels. They're hitting about middle school where they are a number of grade levels behind. That decline in reading has primarily taken place over the summer. So we want to try to work with children so that over the summer months they engage in reading. As a classroom teacher, helping children plan out their summer, helping them think about going to the community library, even taking the class to the library so they know where it is, letting them get a library card. All of these are things classroom teachers can do to really help children read over the summer. There are lots of small grants available from various places like 7-11, Quick Stop. There are some libraries that give some funding to promote summer reading. So I encourage teachers to look for small grants. You may be able to send children home with a number of books for them to read over the summer. All of those things that we do to promote reading over the summer are going to have tremendous payoff particularly for the struggling reader.

A teacher that I worked at the end of the school year at the end of the year had them do decoupage shoe boxes (these were first graders) and she sent that shoe box home with them with a book in it. The book was not a new book. It was a book from the classroom library. She sorted through the classroom library and she put some books on one shelf, and she said, "These are books that you can select from. I'm going to give everyone in the class a book to take home in their library box that you just made. So you get to choose a book to take home." So they selected their books. And she said, "Now this is your library box for the summer. I want you to put all the books you read over the summer in this library box." So she was helping them create that special time, that special space.

Irby DuBose, Apryl Whitman, Christy Long

Ms. DuBose: Our coordinating teacher does a really good job of giving kids access to books to read over the summer. Every year in April or May they go shopping for books, and they get about 15 books to take home with them. It's a great thing. So they all have access to new books over the summer. So I hope they go home excited about those new books and they read them. That's really a problem we face as teachers is that summer setback. So we always say, read, read, read, and it will really help your children maintain what they've done. But it's funny, not this year but in the past, some of my most proficient readers, their parents will say, "I'm sorry, we didn't read any because they had baseball, or this, and I know it's hard to find time. But I know my Mama always kept books in the car, and I always read in the car. but then my husband says reading in the car makes him sick. So just trying to find something that works for your child so they can read every day.

Ms. Whitman: I send home recommendation sheets of things the parents can do to help them. We have a lot of reading nights, so we're giving the parents the skills they need as well to help their children become better readers. So therefore they'll be more likely to do it over the summer. We also partner with the local library. We have Meadowfield teachers who go over the summer and help run the reading program at the library. So it encourages the kids to go to the library to check out books over the summer.

Ms. Long: We encourage them to read over the summer first of all by trying to foster the love of reading. They can take some of my books home if they want to. If they truly latch on to reading and really enjoy reading and the topics they are reading about, then hopefully that will go on during the summer. Our school partners with the Inman Public Library, and they have a reading program for over the summer, where they set goals for themselves and they will earn certificates and even a little medal. We make sure that they have a library card for the public library. Actually each grade level takes a trip to the Inman Library. We can walk there. So we each go, usually 2 classes at a time. The library workers will walk them through their summer program, and show them, here are the books about cars if you're interested in cars, and try to intrigue them to want to come. We have teachers that before school gets out, we record our voice, and talk to them a little bit, and tells who you are, and it goes out as a phone message every week. It will be the same day every week and the same time so they know when that's coming. They hear from their teachers and it might encourage them to read a little more. And that's also posted on our website each week as another teacher calls you, you can go back and look on the website and listen to it again.

**C.C. Bates, Associate Professor, Literacy Education, Clemson University
Director, Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Training Center for South Carolina**

Last summer we had the opportunity with funding from the All In Foundation to participate in a Summer Book Project. That allowed 300 children in the Upstate to take home 10 texts at their independent reading level. So we're really trying to take a look at positioning Reading Recovery and the intervention within a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. We were really focused – these were children who had been successful in intervention, and what we wanted to make sure was that those gains held over the summer. So with funding from Dabo Swinney All In Foundation, we were able like I said to send text home with 300 children, and from that sample, 77.4% of the children came back at the beginning of second grade reading at the end of first grade text level, which is where they ended up at the end of first grade. That's really exciting for us because what we know from research, by Richard Allington and Jimmy Kim, that there is a real and present issue around summer reading loss. And typically children would slide back about 3 months. We expect children at the end of first grade to be reading about text level 16-18. So if they slide back 3 months, they're coming back at the beginning of second grade reading around a text level 10-12. Seventy-seven percent of our children were reading at a text level 16 or above when they came back at the beginning of second grade. It's really exciting to see those gains hold.

Do you think Independent Reading in class helps increase home and summer reading?

C.C. Bates

If we expect children to read during the summer, we have to build that habit during the school year. Children who have been served in the Reading Recovery intervention as part of the intervention are taking books home daily to read at home. That's extremely important. If we're not careful we project the mindset that it's winter vacation, or spring break, or it's the weekend, so we don't take books home. But in the Reading Recovery intervention, we send books home 7 days a week. We don't want to instill in children that it's the weekend, so we don't have to read. And if we work on that mindset of reading habit and reading stamina, then when books go home as part of the summer book flood, they know what to do with them, because it's part of their everyday routine. During the school year, teachers have the opportunity to influence children and to motivate them, and to talk to them about the importance of reading at home. So they get engaged in a good book at school, and the natural progression is to talk that book home at night and read the next chapter. So we really want to promote sending books home during the school year. When we do that, in the summer, it's just part of what they do naturally.

One of the challenges around independent reading at home during the school year is that oftentimes teachers that are just starting their career don't have well established classroom libraries. So we really need to invest and support teachers as they build classroom libraries. It is a real and present issue that some of these books aren't going to make their way back to school. Often teachers invest their personal money into their classroom libraries, and then there's a hesitancy about sending those books home, because there have been studies that show that 20% of the books each year are not going to come back. But that's a sign of a successful take-home reading program because they're actually getting the books out of their book bags. If they aren't taking them out and reading them, chances are they're just going to come right back to school the next day. We want those books to be taken out of the bags, so in that process, there is a chance that they may get lost. Teachers have to understand, and we have to provide the resources for teachers to replenish their classroom libraries, so they can instill that habit during the year, so that when children are home in the summer, it's already part of their everyday practice.

Irby DuBose, Apryl Whitman, and Christy Long

Ms. DuBose: Well I hope so, I hope that they've become so accustomed to the schedule at school that they get home and say, well, I did this at school today so let me read at home as well. I think for some of them it's probably a really easy transition, reading at home, and some not so much. But I like to think that reading at school helps them read at home as well, that scheduling, that routine.

Ms. Whitman: I think it [IR] does [encourage home and summer reading], because they want to go home and share with their parents what they've done. They're proud of themselves when they've, especially when I've shared, hey look what this person did, and they'll go home and share with their parents, let me share this book with you, mom, dad, grandpa, let me show you what's in the book. So it kind of gets them excited, it builds on the stamina so they begin to enjoy reading, because that's ultimate what my purpose is, to let them enjoy reading and become good readers. So doing that in the classroom, they're more willing and confident that they can do it at home.

Ms. Long: I think the IR at school does encourage the children to read at home. #1 they've been validated as to what they're doing at school and they know the correct way to do it, so at home they can do the same. I also try to foster the love of reading. We get to read now, guys, I'm giving you this time, some down time, let's just read. I try to point out to them how important that time is that I'm giving to them so they'll see how important the reading is. And also we read chapter books together, and some are in a series, and so sometimes they'll go and grab the next book in the series to get ahead of my reading, so they know what is going to happen. So sometimes if we send home the same book with them, or something similar on different levels, I'll read the beginning of it, and then I'll stop at a turning point in the book so they're encouraged to want to know what happens next, and leave them hanging. And I'll so, nope, you have to put it in your cubby and do that at home.

I also encourage them to share out with their parents the way that we share in class. Try to find something that you want to tell your parents about that book. If it's a fiction story, we've made a list of how to talk about a fiction story. You might want to talk about how the characters change, or things like that, or how the setting was really different than what you thought it was going to be. So with all the practicing that we do every day in sharing out, they should be able to do that on their own at home. I think that intrigues their parents to be more involved when they start sharing out and not just reading from the book.