Successful Sustained Silent Reading: What Teachers Should Know

Fifteen to thirty minutes a day will lead to students meeting impressive goals:
- belief in self as a competent reader
- an increase of as much as a year and a half's comprehension growth in one semester
- an improvement in student motivation for the sake of reading

Research has shown that several factors play a part in the actual success of sustained silent reading:

Access: 1 ½ to 11 books per student seems to be a good rule of thumb. This should include magazines, comics, newspapers, short story anthologies and other materials. Students should also have the opportunity to visit the library (school or public). They should not have the burden of finding their own reading materials in the beginning of the year.

Appeal: Books in the classroom library should be interesting and provocative enough to entice reading. Using an interest inventory or leading a class discussion should provide information about the topics and authors of interest to the students. Those books that are chosen for the classroom should be attractive, use natural language, employ an element of excitement or humor, cover a wide-variety of types and genres, as well as a wide range of readability. Some sort of creative display should provide students with book reviews or posters to advertise books and entice readers.

Conducive Environment: The classroom should have a homey, comfortable feel. There should be talk time for sharing reading in a risk-free, low-anxiety context.

Encouragement: Students tend to engage more quickly, stay engaged longer, and read more quietly when the teacher reads with the students. They also show an avid interest in the books the teacher chooses to read. It is important that the teacher model reading to project the conviction that reading is both pleasurable and worthwhile (to show that the adult values reading). The teacher should be involved in whole-class sharing (listening, speaking and writing about books) and in individual conferences. It has also been proven that "when students read, they provide a strong incentive for their peers to read," and "what students have to say
to each other about the books they read has far more influence on future reading than any other person or device.” (Pilgreen, 21-22)

**Staff Training:** It is important for teachers to establish consensus on the value of reading and to develop a consistent set of procedures for sustained silent reading. Staff training time provides teachers with the opportunity to analyze and compare results. It also affords the opportunity for teachers to do the following:

- learn to administer reading inventories to establish reading levels,
- determine which demonstration lessons to present,
- talk about how to help students to select and connect to books
- share intervention strategies that are most productive,
- talk about how to facilitate the reading period,
- share which are the most current titles of interest to the students
- discuss how to ensure that the book inventory remains stable.

**Non-Accountability:** Students should have the opportunity and the right to choose their own titles to read and to abandon those books that are not satisfying. There should be no test grades attached as accountability for the reading.

**Follow-Up Activities:** It is important to provide at least 5 minutes twice a week after sustained silent reading for students to tell peers about the exciting parts of their books. The means for telling can be very informal reporting, but it also should periodically take the form of a creative, thoughtful, performance-based project incorporating role-playing, art, music, science or writing. The form should be chosen based on the story and the learning gained from the reading.