

Northwest Practitioner Knowledge Institute Practitioner Knowledge Documentation

Sustained Silent Reading Raquel Ramirez

What the Research Said

The research focus was on Silent Sustained Reading (SSR). SSR research on students of English-as-a-second-language (ESL) has shown that “the amount of time spent reading is related to students’ reading comprehension and vocabulary growth” (Chow & Chou 2000). Students engage in more outside and leisure reading as a result of SSR.

Why I Decided to Use This Particular Research

I was interested in encouraging students to direct their own learning and I wanted them to view themselves as readers in English. SSR supports students’ language development. If students who are parents engage more in outside and leisure reading, they can model reading behavior for their children.

How I Applied These Findings

The class was an intermediate-level ESL class at a community college. It met for two hours, four times a week. Attendance averaged 30 students per class. Most of the students were native Spanish speakers. I used SSR every day in 10 to 15-minute sessions. There was a classroom library (although students were allowed to bring books from home or their local library) and each student kept a reading/vocabulary log that was kept in individual folders. Students tracked each book they read, the number of pages, and wrote a brief summary of what they liked or learned about their books. The class also had a “Book Talk” time so that students could share and converse about their books. To facilitate these talks, a question was posted on the board for students to discuss, for example: *What is one word you learned today? What is one thing you learned from your book? Was this book easy, okay, or difficult to read?*

How I Knew How Well This New Strategy or Approach Worked

At the beginning of the quarter, I had students self-report on their behavior and attitudes regarding their reading by using a student survey. They tracked their attitudes, number of pages read, and new vocabulary in their reading logs. I also observed students to measure how actively they were engaged during SSR and “Book Talk” activities. Students took a vocabulary quiz by choosing several words from their individual vocabulary lists and wrote their own sentences for each word. At the end of the quarter, I gave another student survey. At the end of the quarter, I also had individual conferences with students to discuss what changes, if any, they felt had happened in their reading.

What I Learned About This Strategy or Approach

After conferencing with students individually, overall the students were more positive about their attitudes toward reading. Most reported they felt more comfortable and felt it was easier to read in English. Some reported that they liked it more and were doing more reading at home. A student shared that she had been reading with her children (before SSR), but now she felt more confident reading with them. Another student said that she only read in English now. Most shared what they were reading with their classmates and family members (especially their children). Many felt that their pronunciation and vocabulary had improved.

My biggest challenge was keeping some students (usually the same ones) on task. I did this in various ways, by reminding students individually, talking to the class as a whole about why on-task reading is important, or giving students credit for reading. I would do this by picking random days to check off if they were on task and reading.

Supports and Challenges I Faced When I Used This Research

Networking with other instructors who were using SSR was a support. I also got support from the state trainer and NCSALL. Doing my own research and learning how others have incorporated mSSR into their teaching was helpful. Also, there was buy-in from the state and the program facilitator.

A challenge was ordering materials appropriate to the age, level, and interest of my adult students. Getting full buy-in from some students was another challenge. It was also a challenge for me to model the behavior by sitting and reading. At times, since the program accepted new students up to the sixth week, I had to use this time to help new students choose books. The cost of the books was another factor.

What I Recommend to Other Teachers

One of the most important things that I learned was that students need to know the purpose of reading for pleasure versus the more structured teacher-directed approach to reading. The students and I discussed how reading would support their language development. Seeking support from my students and getting regular feedback was essential in determining what was working and what was lacking to make this a successful approach.

Students need tangible ways to document their progress in reading. The book log helped them track how much they had read. The vocabulary list reflected how much new vocabulary the students knew. The book talks were a good follow-up oral activity and helped promote reading for pleasure.

Adult students also need recognition for the good work that they do. At the end of the quarter, I gave book certificates to the top readers in the class. I identified the top readers by the most books read in a quarter. In order to gain student accountability, it is important to have students reflect periodically on their own progress. Students also set their own goals for reading either a total number of pages or finishing a book at a determined time.

What I Plan To Do Next

My participation in this project encouraged me to try SSR as an approach to reading. I had done SSR at a higher level, so the challenge was finding the appropriate material (at a lower level), sticking with the approach, and modifying it to the group. Trying out a different approach for the first time (and only focusing on one new approach), made this process more manageable. I would like to use this process of working in one area of my teaching in order to integrate new approaches to my teaching. Also, the process of reflection was helpful because it was useful in pointing out some trouble spots and working them out before giving up on the approach altogether.

Chow, P. & Chou, C. (2000). "Evaluation Sustained Silent Reading in Reading Classes." *The Internet TESL Journal*, VI (11) <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Chow-SSR.html>