

Reading Instruction Non-Negotiables

By Tamera Slaughter | Categories: Thought Leadership

What Are Your Reading Instruction Non-Negotiables?

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to read an eye-opening post titled “10 Reading Instruction Non-Negotiables” on the blog *Russ on Reading*. In it, author Russ Walsh touches on his work with a language arts curriculum that ultimately led him to develop a list of ten reading instruction non-negotiables:

- Daily Read Aloud
- Sharing Reading
- Self-Selected Reading
- One-to-One Conferencing
- Direct Instruction in Reading Strategies
- Small Group Instruction
- Rereading
- Talk about Text
- Writing in Response to Reading
- Word Work



What Are Your Non-Negotiables?

My own reading instruction non-negotiables depended heavily on the grade level I was teaching, the teacher I was coaching, or the requirements of the district or administrator. I learned early on as a literacy teacher and coach that in Texas, best practices revolved heavily around “the standards.” Teachers and coaches alike were expected to impress large amounts of content in short bursts of time and yield above-average student achievement, a task that undoubtedly led to a lack of clear expectations and consistency on my part. I knew *what* to do to impact students; I just lacked the time, commitment, courage, and a list to do it. When I read Walsh’s blog for the first time, at first glance, ten non-negotiables seemed like a stretch, especially considering the time constraints teachers have in their classrooms each day. I wanted to compare my list to the list Walsh developed to see how far apart we were. I dug into my literacy educator toolbox to pull out years of notes and journals on effective daily reading instruction. Much to my surprise, Walsh hit the nail right on the head. He includes what I would consider best practices during whole-class instruction: daily read-alouds, shared reading, and direct instruction in reading strategies; he also includes self-selected reading or individualized daily reading, rereading, and talking about text, all of which are important building blocks for meaningful small-group instruction. Lastly, in “10 Reading Non-Negotiables,” Walsh lists writing in response to reading and word work, which, when combined with individualized daily reading, create three of my non-negotiable reading workstations. Imagine my delight. Not only does his blog align with my thinking, but it adds to my toolbox as well.

What Did I Learn?

I read through Walsh's blog a second time, focusing my attention on those practices that were not on my list. Thankfully, the only non-negotiable I could see that we did not have in common was one-on-one conferring: Walsh described one-on-one conferring as "a brief conference that gives the teacher a chance to check that the book is a good choice, to listen to the student read, and have the student do a retelling to assess comprehension." I realized then that not only is this implemented in my classrooms; as a coach, it was what I expected to see teachers engaging in on a daily basis. How else are we to authentically identify and understand our students' strengths and weaknesses? One-on-one conferring is the one tool in a literacy toolbox that keeps on giving. In my class, it typically took place during our reading and writing small-group/independent work time. I would walk the classroom to check in on certain students each day. My individual conference list varied from week to week and I focused on specific skills or strategies based on the assignment. Many of my reflections, reteaching opportunities, and data records stemmed from one-on-one conferring.

Upon reflection, I can honestly say that literacy best practices are just that: best practices. We may use varying names or degrees to identify them, but the end result is the same. I learned individualized conferences and one-on-one conferring are one and the same. If our goal and role as educators is to provide literacy education that builds students' abilities and knowledge base, we have to remain strategic, consistent, and intentional with our delivery.

By now, you should have a sense of where to start when considering reading instruction non-negotiables. If you don't, feel free to utilize the *Russ on Reading* list or my revised list:

- Whole-class Shared Reading
- Guided Comprehension Instruction
- Independent Reading (self-selected text)
- Independent Writing
- Vocabulary Study
- Word Study
- Small-group Guided Instruction
 - Rereading
 - Talking about Text
- One-on-one Conferring

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