

Units of Study for Teaching Reading
A Workshop Curriculum, Middle School Grades

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Question: What are some things an administrator should look for when evaluating progress?

Audra Robb:

Reading workshop is a rich and complex experience for young readers. And I think something administrators want to think about as they're walking around and thinking, "How is reading workshop going?" is the many layers that reading workshop really offers students in terms of reading experiences. So maybe the first and most obvious thing to be tracking, observing, looking for is just how much are kids reading. And that's something that on a daily basis can easily be observed in terms of when you walk into a classroom if it's a reading workshop time, the majority of the time, kids should be reading. Their books should be open. They're reading quietly. They may have a notebook or may not have a notebook. They may have Post-its or may not have Post-its, but volume of reading is one of the first things we're looking for. We say this because it's one of the best indicators of kids being able to make progress. They can't get better at reading if they're not reading. Some kind of way of tracking kids' volume in terms of reading logs is also often helpful. Sometimes those systems get in the way of the reading itself. So something that teachers and students agree is quick, easy to do, and easy to quantify. So quantity of pages matters and that's something I think easy to look for.

Something else that's important is also that kids feel like they're trying to get better at their reading. So on the other side of things is the quality of the reading. So we do want quantity, but it's not a speed-reading curriculum. It's meant to be a curriculum that gets kids smarter and gets kids to challenge themselves more and gets kids to really take up the complexity of the books that they're reading. Teachers are teaching into that, and the best way to see that is to look to see what are the supports in the room for kids not just reading to turn pages, but reading to think about how complicated characters can be or to think about how there's so many different themes in a work of literature that we could consider. So anchor charts for sure are a sign that there's teaching going on. Talking to kids about how those anchor charts affect their reading however is how to see if the teaching is sticking. If the kids are realizing that those are for them and aren't just like a beautiful decoration in the room.

And then I guess the last thing is the notebooks and the Post-its. Writing about reading, the Carnegie Report that came out in 2010, said that any writing about reading that you do deepens your comprehension. So we take that seriously, and at the same time know that when you're writing about reading, you're not reading. So it's tricky. We don't want writing to overtake reading workshop, but if

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kids are doing nothing to track their 300-plus page novel sometimes that they're reading, if they're doing no preparation for the partnership and book club conversations that they're having, it's unlikely their ideas are going to settle, become something more, be able to get more complicated. So we do look at reader's notebooks, we do look at Post-its, as an indicator that that thinking work is taking hold. So I think those three things are a really good indicator on the student side of things that reading workshop is alive and well and they're taking up all the advice of the units.