



Yellow Brick Roads: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading 4-12 by Janet Allen

Taking Heart

In The Schools We Have, the Schools We Want, Nehring says, “One voice has been noticeably absent from the chorus of school-reform literature: students. We hear from scholars and policy makers, task forces and think tanks, sometimes even teachers. But what about kids?” (129). I often spent a lot of time creating resources and planning curriculum that proved counterproductive to my students’ reading lives. When I finally learned to ask the right questions and listen to my students’ answers, it moved me to the heart of changes I needed to make in the classroom. The same is true for me today.

When I began writing this book, I knew that I wanted to include students’ voices as support for the methodology and as impetus to continue our study. I designed a survey questioning students about what reading instruction works for them and what gets in the way of success. I gave the survey to teachers who had previously been involved in professional development with me and asked them to give the survey to students in their reading intervention classes.

Their answers are rich resources for us as we consider where our next professional steps might be with the struggling readers in our schools.

Students mentioned several areas in terms of impediments to reading success:

- Not having the big picture when trying to do smaller pieces
- Not knowing words
- Reading and answering questions at the end of each chapter
- Hating reading
- Filling in circles on tests
- No comprehension at the end
- Not being given enough time to finish
- Workbooks
- Not understanding what is read
- Getting distracted
- Reading out loud
- Remembering what is read
- Boring stuff to read
- Too noisy
- Stopping to sound out every word

These students also had several insights about methods that were helping them improve:

- Extra reading time
- Books on tape
- Someone who pushes me to read

- Following along while the teacher reads
- Having reading buddies
- Helping me change my attitude toward reading
- Feeling successful
- Strategies that help me with comprehension and remembering
- Interesting books to read
- Giving me things to read at home
- Letting me take tapes home to continue reading
- Showing me what I'm doing better
- Helping me decide what to read next

This survey was only administered to a few hundred students in two states, but their input has led me to develop my next research steps. Some of the students took the time to write letters giving me advice about what teachers should do to make reading classrooms more effective places. Those recommendations ranged from making more things into games to giving students more opportunities to do hands-on, collaborative work. My favorite letter told me that I should make sure that teachers love reading if they are supposed to teach it. Asking your students these kinds of questions will help you make critical decisions about expanding certain aspects of your reading plan and eliminating others.