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# The Daily Five: The Data-Driven Future of Literacy Education

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The Daily Five: The Data-Driven Future of Literacy Education

An innovative combination of research-based techniques in an easy-to-read guide to implementation made Gail Boushey and Joan Moser's *The Daily 5: Fostering Literacy Independence in the Elementary Grades* (2006) a manual to take to heart and execute in order to develop the productive and literacy-friendly classroom of the future. The authors, known as "the sisters," invited readers to employ their strategy of independence in their own classrooms by giving straight-forward instruction on how to make “The Daily Five” work in any classroom and data to back up each element of their design. Moreover, the authors have the experience to support the efficacy of “The Daily Five” due to using it in their own classrooms for over ten years. Clearly, the method works and "the sisters" produced the quintessential handbook for every literacy teacher.

The next logical question is: How does it work? Learning independence and students’ choices are the basic principles of the pedagogy of “The Daily Five” and the key motivators for teaching children to read and write. Independence, or autonomy in learning, is undoubtedly backed by research (Cho, Weinstein & Wicker, 2011; Scott, 2011; Sierens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, Soenens & Dochy, 2009); furthermore, research supports choice-making as both a motivator (Brooks & Young, 2011; Crow, 2011) and a demeanor-maintenance strategy (Tanno, Kurashima & Wantanabe, 2011). Obviously, these structural bases are well-founded. In the authors' classrooms, autonomy develops a sense of responsibility for one's own learning, while choice allows students to find a best-fit for their day-to-day learning needs. The authors said the latter best:

Then we think about our own need for choice. We realize we have much in common with our children. There are days when we come to school ready to settle in and get right down to business. Other days, working alone doesn't seem as enticing, so we collaborate with our teaching partners. Our needs tend to dictate how we organize our time and activities. (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p. 92)

Personally, I agree with the authors; I need a sense of independence to focus on my own learning objectives and self-determined deadlines, while wanting the choice of order to best fit my goals to my daily routine and emotional status each day. Independence and choice are essential to any practice and the fundamental pillars of “The Daily Five.”

With the establishment of the mainstays of motivation for “The Daily Five," the authors transitioned into a step-by-step guide to each element of the five. The first element, “read to self,” is an epitome of independence and as data-driven as literacy education can get. The authors first stressed that students must be reading decodable texts and defined methods for teaching students how to select level-appropriate books. Fitting reading materials as a vital element for independent reading is well supported (Cheatham, 2010; Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley, 2003) and the importance of reading to oneself is equally defended (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Krashen, 2004; Pressley, Allingon, Wharton-McDonald, Block & Morrow, 2001; Routman, 2003). Clearly backed by research, the immense value of reading to oneself is unquestionable; however, the actual implementation seems trickier.

The authors suggested using clear modeling to reinforce the behaviors associated with reading to oneself, or “read to self” as it is called in the tome. I fear students may appear to be reading to themselves by simply practicing the modeled behaviors but not genuinely reading. With independent reading being a keystone of “The "Daily Five," I would absolutely need to find a way to monitor students' reading. Nonetheless, the authors suggested that interfering with student autonomy is ill-advised. Whether praising proper behavior or glancing for misconduct, teachers distract students and provide positive reinforcements on which students come to rely. Although I agree with the experienced teachers' style, formative assessment of independent reading and the associated behaviors is critical. Perhaps I can implement “The Daily Five” and find that checking for authentic and comprehended reading is not crucial, but the authors failed to assure me with their text. Nonetheless, I continue to yearn to utilize “The Daily Five” in my own classroom and to see students develop their reading as amazingly as the book indicated.

The next element, "read to someone" is much easier to visualize as an easily implemented and autonomous component of “The Daily Five.” Shared reading has empirical evidence supporting its efficacy in enhancing overall reading skills (Mol & Bus, 2011), evolving comprehension and vocabulary skills (Fisher, Frey & Lapp, 2008; Kesler, 2010; Miller 2002), and helping struggling readers (Allington, 2001; Enguidanos & Ruiz, 2008) in a variety of age groups. Unmistakably data-oriented, reading to someone has benefits for both the reader and the listener such as demonstrating fluency and practicing vocabulary.

Next, the authors included strategies for teaching children to pick pairs for reading and pick optimal shared reading books. These techniques reveal the sisters' understanding and skill with “The Daily Five” through troubleshooting prior to problem emergence. I know “read to someone” will work because data supports the pedagogy and the authors' experiences prepare me for a variety of issues. For instance, I might encounter an odd number of students wishing to participate in “read to someone”. The authors nullify this problem suggesting students will offer to switch tasks in most cases and when they do not I can allow a single group of three. The authors and their expertise left me with no inhibitions in the presence of “read to someone,” which allows me to feel comfortable this element of “The Daily Five” will work in my classroom and support students both strong and weak in their reading skills.

The next component, “listen to reading,” seems slightly redundant and possibly limited by school technology. Listening to reading is backed by research (Allen, 2001; Trelease, 2001); however, the research only aims at listening in general. “Read to someone,” has one student reading and one listening, which seems to indicate listening to reading; meanwhile, “listen to reading” has students listening to audio books. Perhaps the authors envision reading from a unquestionably fluent reader, but the sisters note their use of read-alouds during minilessons elsewhere in their book, which would provide this fluency. Furthermore, use of audio books and the associated technology can get very expensive. The school or teacher would be required to purchase multiple CD or tape players as well as multiple audiobooks. With school budgets tighter than ever and society on an economic downturn, these costs seem unfeasible. I suggest using a class read-aloud in place of “listen to reading” and relying on “read to someone” for more support. Even when working on students’ reading level advancement, the instructor might use multiple copies of a high level book to scaffold students as they read along with the teacher. Although not practical, an adapted version of “listen to reading” seems helpful enough to include in some aspect. Perhaps, “listen to reading” can focus on looking at reading and help readers develop into writers as do the next two elements of “The Daily Five.”

“Work on writing,” or journal time, seems to archetype choice-motivation. In “work on writing” students have the choice to write about anything they want and become motivated by already wanting to write about the chosen topic. Even in my own experiences, I cannot stop myself from writing about something I adore or chose to write about. Young students cannot be much different. Plenty of research supports the notion that the best way to become a better writer is to write (Fletcher & Portalup, 2002; Graves, 1985; Routman, 2005; Roth & Guinee, 2011; Greene, 2011). The authors experiences really show the vigor students have to write. For instance, one student has trouble switching activities because he really wants to get his thoughts on paper. I am sure we have all felt like this from time to time. Further yet, I know from personal experience that writing daily improves writing ability.

I kept a diary when I began middle school through the end of college; I wrote in it almost every day. I was always good at writing in high school and beyond, and I know keeping this diary was the route of my talent. Not only would I spend time writing and reflecting each day, but I would go back and review my writing all the time. I was able to see my developments and track my faults in my writing. Having a journal gives students this same ability. Individuals learn from experience and by documenting my writing I learned how I learned to write and kept those strategies in my toolbox to learn new writing techniques. Students have these same capabilities which make “work on writing” effective in “The Daily Five.”

The final element of “The Daily Five” is “word work” or spending time learning to spell and understand individual words. At first glance this seems like it would only work in a guided, teacher-oriented approach; however, when reviewing the supporting data it seems students need individual time to reflect on words (Murray & Steinen, 2011; Newlands, 2011; Williams, Phillips-Birdsong, Hufnagel, Hungler & Lundstrom, 2009). Students use “word work” time to play with word such as writing them with artistic materials, mapping words or learning about words. “Word work” enhances spelling, vocabulary and simple word comprehension and usage. When I reflect on words I misspell often, I think that writing them with clay or mapping them could fix my repetitive errors even at a graduate student level. If this would work for me, it would certainly work for elementary-aged students. Additionally, “word work” sounds fun; my past experiences were with boring handouts and rote memorization but these would be creative and exploratory practices. Boushey and Moser clearly know what they are doing.

*The Daily 5: Fostering Literacy Independence in the Elementary Grades* had its strengths and weaknesses as all books on technique do. An IKEA assembly guide might be equable for all languages with its use of pictures, but often hard to understand with no words. Similarly, Boushey and Moser's tome had a great routine with a few minor implementation deficits. Nonetheless, many of these flaws could be eradicated in practice and with adaptation. I will definitely use “The Daily Five” methodology in my classroom one day. Learning must be data-driven and “The Daily Five” is undoubtedly based on research. Learning must have motivation and “The Daily Five” includes motivators in its pedagogy. Learning must be effective and with over ten years of experiences using “The Daily Five” in their own classrooms, the authors showed that this method works. I cannot find a distinct reason to not use “The Daily Five” and with its exciting approach to making children love reading, I cannot let the pedagogy bypass my future classroom. Gail Boushey and Joan Moser found the secret to teaching and learning done right and wrote the manual to share that technique. In the changing world I will one day teach in, I need a modern instructional method for literacy and *“The Daily Five”* is the means to the education of the future.

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