

As you visit classrooms late in the year during Self-Selected Reading Block, be sure that...

1. No direct instruction occurs during the read-aloud. The read-aloud is for enjoyment only! Students learn many things incidentally and receive motivation for reading during this time.
2. Teachers are making an effort to maximize the time students spend with their own reading. The read-aloud time should be short (5-10 minutes) and the sharing time short as well (5-10 minutes).
3. Conferencing occurs daily between the teacher and individual students. The tone of the conference should be casual and non-threatening. This is a time that students learn to talk about books.

As you visit classrooms late in the year during Guided Reading Block, be sure that...

1. The minilesson is well-defined (not too "mini"!). It should be apparent to the students what they are expected to learn that day.
2. Only comprehension skills are included during this block! Other skills such as grammar, punctuation, usage, spelling, and decoding are relegated to another block where they are taught in a more appropriate context.
3. Students read or are supported daily in *real* text. The entire block should not be spent on prior knowledge, on vocabulary, on the minilesson or any other element. Time needs to be spent reading or occasionally being read to if that support is needed.
4. Not too much time is spent on this block! The blocks are equal partners (within 5-10 minutes). Teachers should not have the impression that Guided Reading Block is "really" where students are learning to read.
5. No ability grouping is occurring!

As you visit classrooms late in the year during Words Block, be sure that...

1. Teachers are going beyond teaching Word Wall Words! The entire block should not be spent on high frequency words. There are other valuable lessons to learn about words and word patterns.
2. Teachers are using a curriculum to guide planning. They should be sure that all of the valuable patterns appropriate to that grade level are taught. Always thematically planning lessons may not ensure that appropriate curriculum is covered.
3. Activities move at a very brisk pace! If activities move too slowly, students lose interest. Teachers may actually have to leave some children behind during parts of some activities. They should trust that students will still get what is appropriate for them.
4. The transfer step is included in activities since transfer is the ultimate goal. Teachers should clearly state to students how what they are learning will be used in their real reading and writing. This is very important!

As you visit classrooms late in the year during Writing Block, be sure that...

1. The minilesson is embedded in "real" writing during the time teacher models each day.
2. Teachers definitely have moved beyond teaching only conventions of writing (capital letters, spelling, punctuation). Conventions make writing "prettier" and "cleaner" but not necessarily better!
3. More self-selected writing is occurring at primary than focused/assigned writing. Trust that students will still grow as writers!
4. During daily conferences, the teacher is taking the opportunity to grow students individually (especially beyond conventions).

What to Look For In General

1. The teachers' schedules provide adequate time for the blocks. Each block should receive at least 30 minutes and should not exceed 45 minutes.
2. Time allotment for the blocks is fairly equal (GR, WR might get a few extra minutes).
3. No blocks are eliminated unless there are occasional exceptions. If a block is eliminated, you can bet that some children in that class are missing out on their primary way of learning to read!
4. Teachers should not be layering within their language arts program. Four Blocks is a comprehensive program. There is no need for a separate time for spelling, handwriting, grammar, etc. There is an appropriate place for everything that is valued in the language arts area. The layering that you observe on a teacher's schedule may reflect a teacher's lack of understanding about how Four-Blocks works.
5. Direct instruction is occurring within three of the blocks and should be aligned with curriculum. Four Blocks is only how to teach, not what to teach! Something should be guiding the planning.

Remember that this is a good time to talk to teachers to see what they feel less confident about and what they lack understanding in. Now is the time to start planning professional development to strengthen next year's program!