Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition® (CIRC®)

Why Is This Strategy Useful?

Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition® (CIRC®) is a comprehensive reading and writing program for students in Grades 2 through 8. CIRC provides a structure for teachers to teach and students to learn, thereby helping all students become more effective readers and writers. The results of several studies indicate that CIRC has a consistent and educationally significant effect on the reading achievement of all students in the elementary grades, and is particularly effective with students who are reading at lower levels. Students who participated in CIRC made significantly greater gains on standardized reading scales for comprehension and vocabulary.

Description of Strategy

CIRC uses daily 90-minute lessons to focus on story-related activities, direct instruction in reading comprehension, and integrated reading and language arts activities. In a team setting, pairs of students (grouped either by or across ability levels) read to each other, predict how stories will end, summarize stories, write responses, and practice spelling, decoding, and vocabulary. Within cooperative teams of four, students work to understand the main idea of a story and work through the writing process. The CIRC process includes teacher instruction, team practice, peer assessment, and team/partner recognition. Students are rewarded on the basis of the whole team’s performance to provide motivation for peer work. Teams are rewarded on the basis of the sum of team members’ performance on these assessments, creating motivation for peer teaching. A Spanish version of the program was also designed for Grades 2 through 5.

Research Evidence

One randomized controlled trial of 392 third-grade students in 18 classes from rural southern Ohio showed strong evidence for the support of this strategy. Teachers were assigned to experimental and control groups on the basis of geographic representativeness, with an attempt made to equally distribute according to years of teacher experience. The experimental group of teachers received a 1-day (6-hour) training in CIRC prior to the study. Results from achievement tests showed that the students who had CIRC-trained teachers made significantly greater gains in reading comprehension than students taught by the control group teachers. When groups were divided into different reading levels (low, middle, and high), significant differences favoring CIRC were found for the lower group.

Sample Studies Supporting This Strategy


Implemented structured cooperative-learning strategy for reading, CIRC, in nine third-grade classes (n = 198) and compared with nine control group classes (n = 194). The CIRC group outgained controls on Reading Comprehension as measured by California Achievement Test.
When groups were divided into reading levels, significant differences were found for the lower group that favored CIRC.

**Sample Activity**


### Different Types of Story-Related Activities

**Partner reading:** Students read the story silently, then read it orally with their partner. During oral reading, students take turns reading the story aloud, alternating readers after each paragraph. While their partner is reading, the listener follows along, correcting any errors the reader may make.

**Story Grammar and Story-Related Writing:** Students are given questions related to each narrative story emphasizing the story grammar. Halfway through the story, they are instructed to stop reading and to identify and describe the characters, the setting, and the problem in the story, and to predict how the problem might be resolved. At the end of the story students respond to the story as a whole. They describe attempted solutions to the problem and their result, the final resolution of the problem, and ways characters may have changed as a result of their experiences in the story. Students are also given an open-ended writing assignment, where they write a few paragraphs on a topic related to the story.

**Word Mastery List:** Students are given a list of new or difficult words used in the story which they have to be able to read correctly in any order without hesitating or stumbling. Students practice these word lists with partners or other teammates until they can read them silently.

**Word Meaning:** Students are given a list of vocabulary words for the story. Some of the vocabulary words are identified for extensive vocabulary development activities. Students look them up in a dictionary, paraphrase the definition, and write a meaningful sentence for each word that shows the meaning of the word.

**Story Retell:** After reading the story and discussing it in their reading groups, students summarize the main points of the story to their partners.

**Spelling:** Students pretest one another on a list of spelling words each week, and then work over the course of the week to help one another master the list. Students use a "disappearing list" strategy in which they make new lists of missed words after each assessment until the list disappears. Then they are tested on the full list, repeating the process as many times as is necessary to master all of the words.

**Partner Checking:** After students complete each of the given activities, their partners initial an assignment record form indicating that they have completed and/or achieved criterion on that task. Students are given daily expectations as to the number of activities to be completed, but they can go at their own rate and complete activities earlier if they wish, creating additional time for independent reading.

**Tests:** At the end of three class periods, students are given a comprehension test on the story, a test on writing meaningful sentences for certain vocabulary words, and a test on their oral reading of the words on the word mastery list by the teacher. Students are not permitted to help one another on these tests. Test scores and evaluations of the story-related writing are major components of students' weekly team scores.

### Additional Resources