

Independent Reading and School Achievement

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This paper is a review of the research literature about the effects of independent reading on school achievement and the identification of common factors in programs designed to promote independent reading. The purpose of the review is to provide information to policy makers, curriculum developers, parents, teachers, and librarians about the importance of independent reading and programs that support it.

Section 1 defines independent reading and describes its role in learning. Section 2 surveys research studies and evaluation reports assessing the effects of independent reading on learners. Section 3 describes programs designed to promote reading in schools, homes, and libraries. Sections 2 and 3 are organized by the age or grade level of the learners: preschool and kindergarten, primary and elementary grades, and middle school and young adults.

What Is Independent Reading? Why Is It Important?

Independent reading is the reading students choose to do on their own. It reflects the reader's personal choice of the material to be read as well as the time and place to read it. Independent reading is done for information or for pleasure. No one assigns it; no one requires a report; no one checks on comprehension. Independent reading is also called voluntary reading (Krashen 1993; Short 1995; Morrow 1991), leisure reading (Greaney 1980), spare time reading (Searls 1985), recreational reading (Manzo and Manzo 1995), and reading outside of school (Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding 1988).

Voluntary reading involves personal choice, reading widely from a variety of sources, and choosing what one reads. Aliterates, people who have the ability to read but choose not to, miss just as much as those who cannot read at all. Individuals read to live life to its fullest, to earn a living, to understand what is going on in the world, and to benefit from the accumulated knowledge of civilization. Even the benefits of democracy and the capacity to govern ourselves successfully depend on reading. Thomas Jefferson believed that informed citizens are the best safeguard against tyranny. He believed that every citizen must know how to read, that it is the public's responsibility to support the teaching of reading, and that children should be taught to

read during the earliest years of schooling. In a letter to Colonel Edward Carrington, Jefferson (1787) wrote: “The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”

Research indicates, however, that many students do not choose to read often or in great quantities. In recent years scholars from a variety of disciplines have studied the amount of time students choose to read and the effect of literacy on cognitive functions. In a series of studies involving hundreds of students, Morrow and Weinstein (1986) found that very few preschool and primary grade children chose to look at books during free-choice time at school. Greaney (1980) found that fifth-grade students spent only 5.4 percent of their out-of-school free time engaged in reading, and 23 percent of them chose not to read at all. Anderson, Fielding, and Wilson (1988) found that students spend less than 2 percent of their free time reading. Furthermore, as students get older, the amount of reading they do decreases.

The premise that literacy is associated with school achievement, participation in a democracy, and self-fulfillment is widely held. Why then don't students read more? Some suggest that the way reading is taught is not conducive producing students who love to read. In a study for UNESCO, Irving (1980) found that most respondents made no association whatsoever between reading and pleasure.

Many teachers of language arts, recognizing the value of independent reading, immerse students in real literature from their earliest encounters with print and establish sustained silent reading time in their classrooms. According to Anderson, Fielding, and Wilson (1988), students who begin reading a book in school are more likely to continue to read outside of school than students who do not begin a book in school. However, research also suggests that some teachers are not knowledgeable about children's literature; they are not able to introduce students to the wealth of books available, and they may not recognize the effects of their teaching methods on students' attitude toward reading (Short and Pierce 1990).

The common sense notion that students who do a substantial amount of voluntary reading demonstrate a positive attitude toward reading is upheld in both qualitative and quantitative research (Long and Henderson 1973; Greaney 1980; Hepler and Hickman 1982; Greaney and Hegarty 1987; Reutzell and Hollingsworth 1991; Shapiro and White 1991; Mathewson 1994; Barbieri 1995; Short 1995). Students' reading achievement has been shown to correlate with success in school and the amount of independent reading they do (Greaney 1980; Anderson, Fielding and Wilson 1988). This affirms the predictability of a success cycle: we become more proficient at what we practice (Cullinan 1992).

Longitudinal studies that show long-term effects or that isolate the exercise of literacy, however, are missing from the research on voluntary reading and school achievement. Such studies might indicate which factors make a difference in establishing lifetime reading habits and in what influences readers' choice of reading material, that perhaps could help us plan effective programs. Unfortunately very few case studies set in homes, libraries, or classrooms extend over long periods of time (Morrow 1995), and factors associated with the effects of reading are not well defined.

Effects of Independent Reading on Learners

The amount of free reading done outside of school has consistently been found to relate to growth in vocabulary, reading comprehension, verbal fluency, and general information (Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding 1988; Greaney 1980; Guthrie and Greaney 1991; Taylor, Frye, and Maruyama 1990). Students who read independently become better readers, score higher on achievement tests in all subject areas, and have greater content knowledge than those who do not (Krashen 1993; Cunningham and Stanovich 1991; Stanovich and Cunningham 1993). Although the correlations are steady, determining the appropriate causal interpretation of the relationships is problematic. This section reviews research on the status of independent reading, how it develops across age levels, and how it is encouraged.

Preschool and Kindergarten

During the 1930s and 1940s educators believed that children should not be taught to read until they were six and a half years old and performed well on reading readiness tests. This belief was based on a study showing that most children who received formal reading instruction when they were that age usually succeeded in learning to read (Morphett and Washburne 1931). Inferences made from the study established teaching practices for many years. Later researchers went beyond simple chronological age and looked at the literacy experiences children had during their early years (Wells 1986). Other researchers studied children who learned to read without direct instruction before school entrance (Durkin 1966; Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982; Heath 1982, 1983; Holdaway 1979; Mason 1984; Morrow 1995; Ninio 1980; Taylor 1983; Teale 1984; Teale and Sulzby 1986). Some concluded that children learned to read naturally, although a great deal of supportive and interactive behaviors conducive to the learning were apparent. Overwhelmingly the studies show that children from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds learn to read early.

Children who learn to read before school entrance (about 1 percent of the population) are those who are read to, who have someone to answer their questions, and who like to make marks on paper. They are called “paper and pencil” kids (Durkin 1966). Studies show clearly that children need not be from privileged homes in order to learn to read early, but they must have access to print and have someone to read to them (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988). Heath (1982), concluded that the way children interact with books in many homes differs from how they are expected to interact with books in school. Children who come to school with well-developed skills in “taking meaning from books” are clearly at an advantage.

Other researchers looked at the acquisition of reading from a developmental point of view. Clay (1966), a leader in the field, introduced the concept of emergent literacy—the idea that learning to read and write begins very early in life and follows a continuum instead of appearing in distinct stages. Research in emergent literacy shows that children acquire considerable knowledge about language, reading, and writing before coming to school. By the time they are two or three years old, many children can identify signs, labels, and logos they see in their homes and communities (Goodman 1986; Kastler, Roser, and Hoffman 1987; Strickland and Morrow 1989). Emergent literacy researchers found that reading and writing develop concurrently and interrelatedly (Clay 1966, 1991; Sulzby 1985). Children learn to read through active engagement and construct their own understanding of how written language works. Adults help learners by modeling behaviors, such as writing a shopping list. Even more important than the demonstrations of literacy are the

occasions when adults interact with children around print, reading together from pictures and text.

When Durkin (1966) studied the homes of children who had learned to read early, she found that someone in the home read to the children, answered their questions, and encouraged them to write. Wells (1986) counted literacy events (which he defined as any encounter in which the child was involved in reading, writing, or engaging with print), and found that prior to school entrance some children had hundreds of literacy events, whereas others had few or none. The amount of experience that five-year-old children had with books was directly related to their reading comprehension at seven and eleven years old. Children who had engaged in hundreds of literacy events entered school understanding more about the world than children with minimal literacy events and furthermore, they excelled at the end of elementary school. Six years of schooling could not make up for the loss children suffered by not engaging in literacy events in their early lives. Wells stated that of all the activities considered possibly helpful for the acquisition of literacy, only one—listening to stories—was significantly associated with later test scores. The need for extensive early literacy experience was further documented in the research of Durkin (1966), and Teale and Sulzby (1986, 1992).

The value of reading to children is demonstrated repeatedly. Clark (1984), Clay (1979), Durkin (1982), Holdaway (1979), and Smith (1978) showed that reading to children helps them learn that written language differs from oral language, that printed words on a page have sounds, and that print contains meaning. In fact, children who learn to read before coming to school and ones who learn to read successfully in school come from homes where they are read to often (Baghban 1984; Doake 1981; Durkin 1966; Hoffman 1982).

However, being read to does not by itself automatically lead to literacy. The real link seems to lie in the verbal interaction that occurs between adult and child during story reading (Snow 1996). Since children learn language by actively constructing meaning (Vgotsky 1962; Lindfors 1987), the seeds of literacy lie in the social construction of meaning around print, that is, the talk—”scaffolding,” explaining, clarifying—between the reader and child listener as they look at, point to, and label objects, and discuss print and its meaning. Successful storybook reading that leads to literacy involves interaction in which participants actively construct meaning based on the text (Fox 1993; Heath 1983; Ninio 1980; Teale and Sulzby 1992).

Early childhood experiences strongly influence literacy acquisition. Studies of day-care experiences show that children’s literacy learning depends heavily upon what adult caregivers do. Morrow (1991b, 1993) studied the relation between the literacy activities discussed, guided, or modeled by caregivers and children’s voluntary literacy behavior. She found that few day-care classrooms were designed to encourage literacy through writing centers, lots of books, labels, and print. In centers where high literacy behavior was observed, however, adults engaged children in frequent reading and writing activities. They not only made books available, they made them unavoidable. Their enthusiasm for books and stories was contagious. In the centers where low literacy behavior was observed, caregivers perceived play as a time for social and motor development; they did not model or facilitate literacy activities and therefore, few occurred.

Literacy needs to be nurtured. Hurley (1992) studied literacy interactions between adult caregivers and children in a day-care center over a six-month period. She found that although the

day-care workers read to children daily and introduced concepts about print incidentally, they emphasized discipline and behavior control instead of literacy. Adult caregivers need models for interacting with children when they read to them.

Snow (1996) found that talking with children had an even stronger effect on literacy learning than reading aloud to them. During table talk, parents answer children's questions, give them focused attention, and listen to their words. Children learn new vocabulary, clarify misunderstandings, and expand surface-level understandings. Snow pointed out that whereas table talk is ideal, it is the talk that is important and that can occur in the car, during bathtime, and at bedtime.

Ginneti analyzed the preschool experiences of 138 gifted and 92 nongifted children and the background information of their parents. He found that daily experiences with books help all children succeed in school and that gifted children were more likely to be read to daily, have books and reading areas in their homes, and go to the library more than once a month. He concluded that primary caregivers influence a child's development and learning (Ginneti 1989).

The preschool years are the crucial ones for children's language and literacy learning; what happens during those years has a lasting effect on all learning. In all socioeconomic levels some children who have access to print and construct meaning from it learn to read prior to school entrance. Early experiences with language, stories, and print are formative. Children need access to print, but they also need someone to mediate between their own language and the language of the text. This person models reading and helps the child to construct meaning from print.

Primary and Elementary Grades 1–5

The amount of independent reading students do significantly influences their level of reading performance. In a series of studies considered to be benchmark indicators of children's exposure to print, Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) and Fielding, Wilson, and Anderson (1986) asked fifth-grade students to record their activities outside of school. In one study, fifty-three students kept logs of free-time activities for eight weeks, and in the second study, 105 children kept logs for twenty-six weeks. In both investigations children averaged ten minutes per day reading books—little more than 2 percent of their time but enough to make a significant difference in reading achievement scores. Fifty percent of the children read from books four minutes a day or less. Thirty percent read two minutes a day or less. Almost 10 percent reported never reading any book on any day. For the majority of children, reading books occupied 1 percent or less of their free time.

Anderson, Fielding, and Wilson (1988) compared the amount of student reading with their scores on achievement tests. The number of minutes spent in out-of-school reading, even if it was a small amount, correlated positively with reading achievement. The more students read outside of school the higher they scored on reading achievement tests. Students who scored at the 90th percentile on a reading test spent five times as many minutes as children at the 50th percentile, and more than 200 times as many minutes per day reading books as the child at the 10th percentile. The researchers conclude that “among all the ways children spent their time, reading books was the best predictor of measures of reading achievement reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading speed, including gains in reading comprehension between second and fifth grade” (285).

Greaney and Hegarty (1987), leading researchers in the area of independent reading, asked 138 fifth graders to use diaries to record their leisure activities four days a week. Results showed that 18 percent indicated that they do not read at all, and 31.5 percent read three or more hours during the weekly reporting period. Overall, students devoted 7.2 percent of their leisure time to reading. Correlational measures show a significant relation between the amount of time devoted to independent reading and reading achievement, verbal ability, attitude toward reading, and home influence factors. And students who read the most scored in the top quartile in reading achievement tests. Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) summarized numerous studies from the past sixty years and found a statistically significant relation between academic achievement and independent reading.

Watkins and Edwards (1992) found that proficient middle-grade readers tend to spend more time doing recreational reading and make greater gains in reading achievement than less able readers. Less able readers consistently read less than proficient readers and rank below average in reading skill. Academic performance is closely related to reading performance. Watkins and Edwards also found that teachers' attitudes toward reading significantly affect the amount of extracurricular reading students do.

Allen, Cipielewski, and Stanovich (1992) asked sixty-three fifth-grade students to complete daily-activity diaries for nonschool time for fifteen days. They also used checklists of book titles, authors, and activity preference as a way to estimate exposure to print. All measures of print habits and attitudes (except for one reading attitude survey) were consistently related to the verbal ability measures (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Metropolitan Achievement Tests, Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, Educational Records Bureau Aptitude Achievement Test), which confirmed earlier findings (Stanovich 1986). Print exposure was more strongly linked to performance in the verbal domain than in the domain of mathematics computation. The checklist measures of title and author recognition and activity preference held up as valid indicators of children's exposure to print.

Bertland (1988) found that students' patterns of borrowing books from the library for recreational reading hinge on the attitudes of their teachers. Teachers who consistently bring their classes to the library for skills lessons and to do content-area research have students who frequently use the library for independent reading. On the other hand, teachers who do not bring their classes to the library to select books have students who check out fewer books per person.

Krashen (1989, 1993, 1995a 1995b) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of forty-one studies on in-school free reading, sustained silent reading, and self-selected reading programs. In thirty-eight of forty-one studies, students who engaged in free reading did as well or better on standardized tests of reading comprehension than students who were given direct instruction in reading. Krashen's meta-analysis showed that in-school free reading programs are related to vocabulary development, knowledge of grammar, writing, and oral language facility. Correlations between free voluntary reading and scores on literacy proficiency tests are not always highly significant statistically; however, they are consistent and show that free voluntary reading does make a difference.

Krashen (1993, 1995a) also examined the results of out-of-school studies in which participants gave self-reports of their free voluntary reading. The results of these studies confirm the in-school studies: more reading results in better reading comprehension and related literacy skills.

Students' reading ability and desire to read are affected by the structure of the texts they read. If texts are well organized, have a logical flow, and include relevant information, they are inviting and reader friendly. Unfortunately the quality of writing used in some content-area textbooks found in American classrooms is considered deficient in some respects (Anderson and Armbruster 1984; Armbruster and Gudbrandsen 1984; Flood et al. 1991). Some textbooks are simply "baskets of facts," little more than loosely connected lists of propositions about a topic. The organization of chapters, the structure of expository text, and the language may be murky. Traditional expository structures such as cause-effect, temporal sequence, or comparison-contrast are seldom found. Students often find more clearly written expository text in good informational trade books than in textbooks (Freeman and Person 1992).

Independent reading builds background knowledge. It contributes to knowledge of text content and familiarity with standard text structures. Independent reading contributes to vocabulary growth. Readers with a rich vocabulary understand content and appreciate the language used in well-written texts. A synthesis of existing reports suggests that students in grades 3–12 learn about 3,000 new words a year (Nagy, Anderson, and Herman 1987). Students acquire knowledge of some vocabulary words as the result of direct instruction, but that could only account for a modest proportion of the total. To learn 3,000 words a year would require learning about fifteen words every school day—more than even the most enthusiastic teacher would attempt to teach. Vocabulary is learned from reading (Anderson et al. 1984; Nagy, Anderson, and Herman 1987; Read 1986; Read and Hodges 1982; Rice, Meyer, and Miller 1988).

In a meta-analysis of studies related to the influence of the Newspaper in Education program on later newspaper readership, Stone (1988) found positive results. Students who participate in the program have less trouble reading newspapers, enjoy reading them more, and are likely to be current newspaper readers. Their interest in hard news increases, and they become interested in public affairs. Interest in leisure time reading of newspapers was corroborated by Mellon (1990) in her study among rural teens.

Collectively, research supports the fact that during primary and elementary grades, even a small amount of independent reading helps increase students' reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling facility, understanding of grammar, and knowledge of the world. Research also shows that a variety of means can be used to measure exposure to print, such as diary records of amount of time spent reading, author recognition, title recognition, and activity preference checklists. Whereas these measures appear to be good predictors of verbal outcomes when used individually, they are stronger when used in combinations.

Middle School and Young Adults: Grades 6–9 and 9–12

Age level is a primary factor that shapes why people read, what they read, how much they read, and what they do with what they read. Furthermore *when* students started to read affects their subsequent school experiences and reading competence. Developmental influences are strong.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is administered every five years to a sample of nine-, thirteen-, and seventeen-year-old students across the United States. Searls, Mead, and Ward (1985) analyzed NAEP data and found that age is a determining factor in how much time students spend watching television and how much time they spend doing spare-time reading. Time spent watching television as well as doing spare-time reading declines as children

reach adolescence. Similar results emerged in studies by Watkins and Edwards (1992) and Greaney and Hegarty (1987). However, Moffett and Wartella (1992) found that after a decline in mid-adolescence, reading increases again during eleventh and twelfth grades.

Grunwald (1996) cited a study showing that young people's use of computers shifts away from games and toward accessing information as they get older. Students who use computers watch TV less frequently than those who do not use computers. People in households with computers spend just as much money on reading material as those without computers (Rawlinson 1996). The early trends are promising, but further study needs to be done on the effect of computer use on the amount of reading done.

In two surveys using self-report by subjects, McCoy et al. (1991) found a decrease in recreational reading during middle school years. In one study, one hundred students in college-level developmental (remedial) reading courses reported a marked decrease in recreational reading during middle school. In a second survey, a majority of 159 seventh- and eighth-grade students reported reading independently up to seventh grade but practically ceasing to read anything not required or assigned after that. Recreational reading ranked lowest among their preferences for independent activities.

Feitelson and Goldstein (1986) found that light reading provides motivation for more reading. Students who read books in series (several books written about the same characters) developed reading fluency and the linguistic competence necessary to read higher quality material. They gained knowledge of the world, learned story structures, and became aware of literary devices by reading series books. Light reading became a stepping stone to further reading. Increased reading proficiency and fluency makes it possible for students to read more complex material. They often choose light reading for independent reading because they enjoy it, and they become more fluent readers in the process. Adults who encourage students to develop the reading habit through light reading can lead them to further reading. Students must take the first step of developing reading fluency before they can take the second step of becoming avid readers.

There is some evidence from case studies and large group research that light reading, such as comic books, leads preteens and young adults to more, if not always higher quality, reading. For example, researchers Dorrell and Carroll (1981) placed comic books in a junior high school library but did not allow them to circulate; students had to come to the library to read them. The researchers compared circulation figures of non-comic-book material and total library use during the seventy-four days the comics were in the library with the fifty-seven days prior. Library use increased 82 percent with a 30 percent increase in the circulation of non-comic-book material. Other studies, however, showed that comic book reading does not correlate positively with higher levels of literacy (Allen, Cipielewski, and Stanovich 1992).

Educators have long lamented students' academic losses during the summer break. They are discouraged when students perform well in May or June but return in September reading at a level six months or a year below their earlier performance. Heyns (1978) studied sixth-grade students from varied racial and socioeconomic groups to search for differences between those who regressed and those who continued to learn over the summer. She found that the single summer activity that is most strongly and consistently related to summer learning is reading (161). Whether measured by the number of books read, the time spent reading, or regularity of library usage, reading systematically increased the students' vocabulary scores.

Barbieri (1995) found that seventh-grade girls read for personal reasons: to clarify their beliefs, to find out who they are, and to discover that they are not alone. Like Atwell (1987), she found that time, choice, and response are necessary parts of a literacy program if students are to develop enthusiasm for reading. Psychologists Brown and Gilligan (1992) found that girls' sense of identity is deeply rooted in their perceptions of relationships, which they see as a way of knowing, an opening between self and others that creates a channel for discovery—an avenue for knowledge (28). Girls read to explore relationships; it is central to their reading. Barbieri (1995) found that girls read to search for answers to personal problems that bother them. Students want the freedom to choose the books they read, to talk with peers about the books, and to respond to reading in ways they chose.

Most educators are concerned about what students read because reading only light material does not automatically result in an ability to read advanced material. Hafner, Palmer, and Tullos (1986) found that better readers preferred complex fiction. In a large-scale study in fifteen countries, Thorndike (1973) found that for fourteen-year-olds, the types of reading that correlated best with reading comprehension were (1) humor, (2) history and biography, science fiction, myths, and legends, and (3) adventure and current events. By the end of secondary school, the pattern changed somewhat: students with the highest levels of reading comprehension read history, biography, technical science, philosophy, and religion. Mellon (1990) found similar reading tastes and habits among rural teens.

Cunningham and Stanovich (1991) assessed the construct validity of a new measure of exposure to print by using a book title recognition test (TRT) with middle school students. The TRT correlated significantly with spelling, vocabulary, verbal fluency, word knowledge, and general information. Further, the TRT accounted for variance in the criterion variables when differences in both general ability and phonological decoding ability were controlled. Although correlational, the data suggest that print exposure is an independent contributor to the development of verbal abilities. Based on cumulative data from several studies, Cunningham and Stanovich (1991) concluded that print exposure is a significant, unique predictor of spelling, vocabulary knowledge, and general world knowledge.

Stanovich and Cunningham (1993) continued to question where knowledge comes from; they challenge “cognitive efficiency” theorists who say that the crucial variable in learning is not exposure *per se*, but conceptual need and inference of meaning from context. They also challenge those who say that information is available to individuals in all but the most seriously deprived environments and conclude that exposure to print could not account for differences. In their study of 268 college students, measures of exposure to print predicted differences in knowledge in a variety of subject domains after individual differences on four indicators of general ability had been statistically controlled. Although correlational, the results suggest that exposure to written sources of information is an independent contribution to the acquisition of content knowledge.

Educational policy makers have asked questions about when to begin teaching children to read. Hanson and Farrell (1995) conducted a followup study of 3,959 high school seniors from twenty-four school districts in ten states. Using curriculum guides and school records, they assessed the inclusion of kindergarten reading instruction, family background, and educational history variables. Following a direct assessment of reading interests and competencies of high school seniors, they compared the relationship between reading instruction in kindergarten, students'

subsequent schooling experiences, and their reading competencies as high school seniors. Their data show clear, consistent, and positive differences associated with receiving instruction in reading in kindergarten. The advantage of early instruction in reading was maintained throughout schooling and remained evident at the senior high school level.

Summary

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have attempted to specify the effects that reading has on cognitive functioning, but it is difficult to document specific behavioral outcomes associated with reading. Spurious correlations may arise because literacy levels correlate with many other desirable behaviors. It is well known that exposure to print is a good predictor of spelling, vocabulary knowledge, and general world knowledge. Even when the variance attributable to general ability and phonological decoding are controlled, measures of exposure to print correlate significantly with spelling, vocabulary, verbal fluency, and general information. Research shows that the amount of time spent reading varies by age level.

Programs to Promote Independent Reading

Schools and public libraries develop programs intended to increase the amount and quality of reading students do. The programs are located in homes as well as in schools and public libraries. Some are more effective than others.

Preschool and Kindergarten

Programs for preschool children leading to independent reading traditionally include story hours, parent and child programs, book-related activities, and other outreach attempts. Librarians work to reach underserved families, such as homeless children and their families, the physically handicapped, children from homes where English is not the primary language, and other groups with special needs.

Bridge and Carney (1994) described a reading program where university students read to inner-city kindergarteners in a ten-week program. The program also encouraged parents to read to their children at home. Evaluation data show that children's scores on literacy tests improved and the level of parent involvement in their children's reading increased.

The Nassau County (NY) Public Library offered a program designed to increase literacy and promote library use among disadvantaged families (Towey 1990). The project, called Babywise and funded through a Library Service and Construction Act Title I grant, began as an outreach effort for low-income families and teen parents with children under age two. Librarians met with families who did not ordinarily use the library to explain to them the importance of reading aloud to preschoolers, to present developmentally appropriate picture books, and to model reading to children.

Librarians explained the connections between reading aloud, children's language development, vocabulary growth, and familiarity with the written word. They explained that reading to children and talking about books stimulates children's imagination, curiosity, and thinking ability. It also improves children's ability to concentrate and stay focused. Parents received a

copy of the storybook *Goodnight Moon* (Brown 1947), as well as an information brochure and a coupon to be redeemed for a free book at their local public library.

Program evaluators used the number of coupons redeemed at public libraries as one indicator of the effectiveness of the program. Success of the program was also measured by the increase in new child and family members who became regular library users identifying themselves as Babywise participants. The program was judged successful and was extended by sending librarians into Head Start and day-care centers to read stories to preschool children.

The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC 1996), a division of the American Library Association (ALA 1996) administers five national demonstration sites that reach out to at-risk teenage parents to help them raise children who are “Born to Read.” It partners librarians and healthcare professionals to teach expectant and new parents the importance of reading. A collection of picture books placed at the health department, parenting classes, and storytimes held at local housing projects are featured in Henderson, North Carolina. The program in Provo, Utah, includes Time with Father sessions, parenting material, followup visits, and free toy and book distributions to at-risk families. A third demonstration site expands the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, program through read-aloud clubs, presentations on nutrition, child development, and immunizations. The Pittsburgh program, Beginning with Books, was conceived as an illiteracy prevention program (Segel and Friedberg 1991). Staff members distribute packets of three high-quality paperbacks or board books (sturdy, thick, indestructible books designed for easy handling by small hands) to low-income families with young children. Staff members also give parents a pamphlet with tips on reading to children and a coupon to be exchanged at the nearest library for another free book. Two evaluations of the program indicate that early intervention does promote home reading. The number of families who reported reading to a child once a day or more increased from 47 percent to 69 percent after receiving the books and the counseling.

Locke (1988) evaluated changes in family practices of reading aloud to children in the Beginning with Books project. In this program, project staff distributed packets of books with suggestions for reading aloud to families in waiting rooms at baby clinics. After receiving the books, 69 percent of the parents reported that someone read to or looked at the books with the child at least once a day or more. Prior to the program, the percentage of parents who read to their children was much smaller.

Edwards and Panofsky (1989) worked with low socioeconomic status mothers and their four-year-old children to see whether a program that stressed the importance of reading to children or a program that modeled how to share books with children would be effective in a short-term study. Mothers in both groups increased the level of talk they initiated (questions, observations, comments to the child), but the mothers who saw how to share books modeled showed a more pronounced effect.

The concept of partnerships has taken hold in the field of literacy development. The Library-Museum-Head Start Partnership began with an interagency agreement between the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress in cooperation with ALSC and the Head Start Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The purpose of this partnership was to promote the role of public libraries and librarians in enhancing the Head Start curriculum, supporting Head Start teachers, and extending the Head Start program into the home. As of 1994 the

partnership has grown to include the Association of Youth Museums and involves librarians, Head Start teachers, Center for the Book staff, and others. Videos, workshops, regional meetings, and staff development result from these partnerships (ALSC 1996).

Other effective research-based programs exist in public libraries throughout the country (Greene 1991; Nespeca 1990, 1995; Morrow, Tracey, and Maxwell 1995; Thomas and Cooper 1995; Van Orden 1992; Weir 1989). For example, WEE CARE operates in Prince George's County, Maryland, and the "Magic Bus" brings books to preschool centers in Denver, Colorado. The Early Childhood Resource and Information Center (ECRIC) in New York City, has a three-pronged approach: a series of staff development seminars for care givers, a model resource collection, and a family room with books, rugs, and rocking chairs for children and their care givers (Nuba, Searson, and Sheiman 1994). People and institutions working together in many communities can achieve success in promoting reading.

Library programs for preschoolers are founded on the knowledge that early literacy experiences have a positive effect on language growth, reading development, and scholastic achievement (Pellegrini and Galda 1991). Effective programs encourage parents to take an active role in preparing their children for success in school. Giving preschool children the necessary literacy experiences enables them to enter school ready to learn to read and write. Common factors of successful programs for preschool children include active parent involvement, access to books and libraries, models in the use of books, and efforts to make people feel at ease in libraries.

Primary and Elementary Grades 1–5

Primary and elementary school ages are critical periods in the development of reading skill and in the formation of lifelong reading habits. Studies of students of these ages center on classroom and school library environments and practices. For example, Morrow (1991a, 1991b) and Morrow and Weinstein (1986) conducted observational as well as experimental classroom-based studies. In one experimental study library centers were set up in classrooms to provide literary and literacy activities based on books and authors. New titles added to racks and shelves were placed open-faced to show the fronts of books instead of the spines to encourage browsing. Picture books, short chapter books, humorous stories, informational books, and magazines were included in the classroom collections. Students used flannel boards for storytelling and tape recorded stories or their retelling to accompany the books. They also created books of their own that became a part of the library collection. Students could take home the commercially published books as well as student-authored books to read. They kept records of what they read both at home and school. The substantial increase in numbers of children who selected independent reading as a free-choice activity was maintained long after the study was completed. It is now a fully integrated feature of the current reading program (Morrow 1991b).

Herb (1987) studied the effects of story hour and book borrowing strategies on the emergent reading behavior of first-grade children. He found that story hours with carefully selected books, which children take home to read with their parents, positively affected the children's ability to read those texts.

Rasinski (1994) described a successful attempt to get primary grade children off to a good start learning to read through an intensive, systematic parental involvement program. Parents and children read together from brief, highly predictable texts each day and engaged in language

development activities such as sentence-building activities. The program had positive effects on primary grade students as evidenced by an improvement in their word recognition, fluency, and overall reading proficiency.

A number of articles describe successful library summer reading programs. Summer reading programs have typically been effective in that they help participants maintain their reading proficiency. Walter et al. (1994) described the Family Reading Program in Montana, and Feldman and Park (1994) described the New York State Summer Reading Program. Cohen and Sprince (1994) described the Florida Library Youth Program, an extension of the summer library program, a long-running program that was so successful it was extended to provide services throughout the year for students ages six to twelve. The program theme, COLOR, was used as an acronym for Celebrate Our Love Of Reading. This was spelled out in sections identified by color: for example, humor (red), foods (yellow), conservation (green), and multicultural (rainbows).

Criscuola (1994) described a pilot study of the Junior Great Books program in the third grades of the Chicago public schools between 1989 and 1991. The program was successful in helping students of all ability levels understand literature and reading for meaning. Students were able to construct inferential and thematic meaning from their reading through a strategy that stressed shared inquiry with reading, rereading, and reexamining the text.

Tutoring programs not only help the students being taught (tutees) but may also help the people doing the teaching (tutors) (Fox 1994). Ross and Smith (1994) described Success for All, a program that involves cooperative learning, regrouping, tutoring, early reading instruction, writing, active learning, and family support in inner city schools. The program was so successful that Slavin et al. (1993) replicated it in eight additional locations.

The National Library Power Program, a major initiative of the DeWitt Wallace–Reader’s Digest Fund, was designed to create public elementary and middle school library programs that improve the quality of education for children. Started in New York City in 1988, the program has expanded to nineteen communities, representing thirty-four school districts, and reaching more than 450,000 children. Library Power funds may be used to match state and local funds for print and nonprint materials, to provide professional development for teachers, librarians, and administrators, to refurbish library spaces, and to develop outreach programs for parents and other caregivers in the community. Program staff recognize that libraries can and do make significant contributions to student learning; however, partnerships among leaders in school districts, public libraries, community agencies, parent groups, business communities, and academic institutions are critical if school library programs are to be effective in encouraging reading and in meeting students’ needs.

In a synthesis of research, Flowers and Roos (1994) concluded that literature-based reading programs are most effective when (1) the program is introduced at the earliest grades, (2) librarians, teachers, and parents cooperate, and (3) the environment encourages students to view themselves as good readers.

School and library programs that are successful with primary and intermediate grade students share some common elements:

- Tutoring programs are often beneficial to the person doing the teaching as well as to the child being taught.
- There are materials to interest students of differing reading abilities and interests. Significant adults in children's lives, such as teachers, librarians, parents, and community leaders, cooperate to assure successful implementation of programs and resources.
- Beginning readers or struggling readers receive the support and modeling necessary to learn to read.
- Students who know how to read continue to have models who read to them.
- All students are provided with adequate time for sustained silent reading and choice of what to read.

Middle School and Young Adults: Grades 6–9 and 9–12

Morris and Kaplan (1994) developed a program to increase independent reading among middle school readers, who are at an age when independent reading tends to drop. As part of the program, parents came to school to participate in discussion groups organized around books their children chose to read. The program led parents to continue reading and discussing books with their children outside of the organized groups.

Teaching practices have a lasting effect on students' ability and willingness to read. Ozburn (1995) described a sustained silent reading program in a ninth-grade reading class of sixty, most of whom were at-risk students. Students gained an average of 3.9 year levels on their reading achievement test scores during a one-year program. Kelley (1992) surveyed public and school librarians in Massachusetts. Several hundred librarians were asked to describe factors necessary to promote reading and instructional use of the library among students (ALA 1988; Kelley 1992; Krashen 1993). The factors they identified include adequate budgets to provide media resources and up-to-date collections, and enthusiastic, certified school and public librarians available to serve students.

Increasingly, businesses, schools, and libraries are cooperating to encourage reading. For example, the Library Administration and Management Association (LAMA), a division of ALA, sponsors workshops on creating alliances and partnerships among business, community, and libraries (LAMA Institute 1995). The seminars focus on establishing coalitions among community organizations, business, and government to support literacy at all levels. Another successful library, school, and business alliance encourages students to sign up for library cards as a part of ALA's "Sign Me Up" contest. Public librarians visit local schools, teachers bring their students to the library, and the *World Book* provides prizes.

Some common features of effective programs cited for primary and intermediate students remain the same for programs for middle school students and young adults, for example, active parental involvement in student learning, partnerships among community institutions, and collaboration among school and public librarians and teachers. The added freedom of middle school and young adult students makes it imperative to give adequate time for independent, self-chosen reading, to demonstrate the value and pleasure of reading and writing, and to make technology available in the search for information.

Conclusion

Independent reading is the kind students choose to do on their own; it is not assigned or assessed, but it has a positive effect on learning and school achievement. Research about the effects of independent reading on school achievement and programs planned to promote it demonstrates these common factors:

- The amount of free reading done outside of school has consistently been found to relate to achievement in vocabulary, reading comprehension, verbal fluency, and general information. Students' reading achievement correlates with success in school and the amount of independent reading they do (Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding 1988; Guthrie and Greaney 1991; Krashen 1993; Cunningham and Stanovich 1991; Stanovich and Cunningham 1993).
- Numerous surveys show that many students do not choose to read great quantities, nor do they choose to read often (Morrow and Weinstein 1986; Greaney 1980; Anderson, Fielding, and Wilson 1988).
- The preschool years are crucial ones for children's language and literacy development (Baghban 1984; Clay 1991; Durkin 1966; Heath 1983; Ninio and Bruner 1978; Snow 1996).
- Library programs are founded on the knowledge that literacy experiences have a lasting effect on language growth, reading development, and scholastic achievement (ALSC 1996; ALA 1996; Bridge and Carney 1994; Towey 1990).
- Common features of effective programs designed to promote reading in schools, homes, and libraries include access to varied material that appeals to all ages and tastes, active parent involvement, partnerships among community institutions, and collaboration among significant adults in students' lives.

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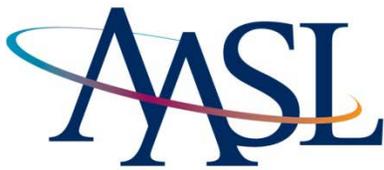
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