

The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research

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Observations and Reflections from
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The Power of Free Voluntary Reading

Research says that FVR:

- is effective in increasing and improving reading
- is pleasurable
- results in superior general knowledge
- improves spelling, writing, grammar
- helps ELL learners dramatically
- Improves scores on reading tests and other subject matter tests
- Results in better reading comprehension, writing style, and increased vocabulary
- Develops better thinkers
- Works when students truly have choice, when the program is consistent and continued, and when teachers are also reading when students are reading

What we can do:

- School-wide SSR
- Individual classroom SSR
- Have a variety of books available for low-level readers—comics, series books, etc.
- Publicize suggested reading lists
- Survey kids about their reading interests
- Librarian put out list of kids' favorite books and their interests
- Encourage teachers to develop in-class libraries
- Solicit books through newsletter, civic groups
- Establish a reading-as-reward system
- Encourage reading aloud in class
- Read aloud to Special Ed and ELL students
- Talk about reading with colleagues and students
- Extend library hours—talk to Kiwanis and other groups about providing funding or volunteers

The Power of Reading and Vocabulary Development

What the research says:

- Vocabulary is best developed through real encounters with the words in context, over time, and in small doses
- Acquiring a word requires acquiring all of its subtle and complex qualities-hard to teach with direct instruction
- Time spent teaching vocabulary lists better spent doing free voluntary reading—more likely to result in word acquisition.

What we can do:

- Eliminate or reduce vocabulary lists and tests
- Provide in-context vocabulary through the reading of paragraphs
- Evaluate the level of vocabulary we expect students to attain; set priorities, determine what matters
- Vary the vocabulary input between additional readings and other avenues—use short excerpts to introduce new words
- Provide more free reading time and greater access to books.

The Power of Reading and Spelling

What the research says:

- More reading=better spelling
- FVR just as effective or more effective than teaching spelling by direct instruction
- Uninstructed students learn to spell just as well as instructed students when given time fore FVR
- Children can spell a substantial number of words they haven' t been directly taught
- Each word taught through direct instruction requires 20 minutes of time.

What we can do:

- Provide more time for reading
- Replace spelling practice and instruction with free reading
- Encourage students to spell correctly in all situations to avoid developing bad habits (such as those they often develop using email).

The Power of Reading and Libraries

What the research says

- Better school libraries result in more reading
- The more hours a library is open, the more reading done by students
- More planned trips to the library with teacher and class results in more reading
- Physical environment of library contributes to how much reading is done
- Size of school library is accurate predictor of reading test scores
- The more money invested in school library, the higher test scores
- The higher the quality of the library staff, the better the achievement of students
- Unlimited check-outs and book displays result in more reading

What we can do:

- Increase library hours before and after school
- Increase high-interest-low-level and ELL collections
- Encourage collaboration with teachers besides English and social studies
- Increase collection to approach 18 books per student
- Find additional sources of funding for the library, such as civic groups and grants
- Build library at Burlington North (alternative school)

The Power of Reading and English Language Learners

What the research says:

- Developing literacy in first language key to developing literacy in new language
- FVR improves attitudes about reading among ELL students
- Light reading material, such as comics and romances, can be elemental in providing easy, enjoyable reading for ELL students.
- ELL students can improve reading, spelling, and comprehension through FVR alone
- Students who read for pleasure in their heritage language have better retention of that language than students who don't

What We Can Do:

- Make more high-interest, low-level ELL books available in the library
- Schedule more time for ELL classes to visit the library
- Provide more time for ELL to just read
- Teachers need to be aware of whether ELL are literate in heritage language
- Provide more books in Spanish
- Visit public library with ELL

The Power of Reading and Reading Aloud

What the research says

- When teachers read aloud and discuss stories with students, students read more
- Students who are read aloud to check out more library books
- Hearing stories and discussing them encourages independent reading
- Hearing stories has a direct impact on vocabulary development
- Children who are read to at least three times a week read better
- Students enjoy being read to

What we can do:

- Read aloud to students in all classes across the curriculum
- Read even short pieces, such as newspaper articles
- Ask the librarian for help in finding things to read aloud
- Find and read stories with suspense about topics in your area
- Read article “Are We Reading to Our Teens?” in Book Report May/June 2000—ask Cathy Belben for a copy

The Power of Reading and Light Reading: Comic Books

What the research says:

- Evidence suggests that light reading leads to more serious reading
- Those who read more comic books also read more other books, too
- Reading comic books is associated with greater enjoyment of reading in general
- Comic books play important role in helping readers gain confidence and learn to enjoy reading
- Comic books often introduce new, sophisticated vocabulary

What we can do:

- Allow comic book reading during FVR
- Build a graphic novel collection in the library
- Encourage all types of reading, not just the classics
- Provide light reading, such as Readers' Digest, magazines, and more books
- Concentrate on serving all populations, especially special ed and lower-level readers
- Consider our philosophy—is it to have students read anything or to read specific things, or a combination of both?

The Power of Reading: Conclusions

- What does the book suggest about the importance of free voluntary reading?
- What is free voluntary reading?
- How are we incorporating free voluntary reading into our classes and our school day?
- How can we incorporate more FVR into our classes and school day?
- What else can we do to promote reading, model reading, and help students see its value and enjoyment?