THE
Joy & Power
of READING

A SUMMARY OF **RESEARCH** AND **EXPERT OPINION**

SCHOLASTIC

THE
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THE JOY AND POWER OF READING

Introduction

WHAT READING MAKES POSSIBLE

Reading shapes lives; reading even saves lives. Consider the stories of our greatest leaders across time, culture, and place. Almost all credit reading as an essential force that catapulted them to success. Thomas Edison, for example, had little formal schooling but was a "relentless autodidact" and profited mightily from reading books in his father's home library, as well as the Detroit public library (Walsh, 2010).

But Edison's story has its basis in science; indeed, explicit, systematic cognitive research gathered over many decades provides proof beyond dispute that reading not only builds our brains, but also exercises our intelligence (Krashen, 2011).

Reading Makes Us Smart

Anne Cunningham, renowned cognitive psychologist at the University of California, Berkeley, explains that reading is a "very rich, complex, and cognitive act" (2003) that offers an immense opportunity to exercise our intelligence in ways we lose if we don't read. Hundreds of correlated studies demonstrate that the most successful students read the most, while those who struggle read the least.

These studies suggest that the more our students read, the better their comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency—and the more likely they are to build a robust knowledge of the world. In short, reading provides us with a cognitive workout that transcends not only our inherent abstract problem-solving abilities, but also our levels of education. Reading makes us smart.

"

A childhood spent among books prepared me for a lifetime as a reader.

—Carol Jago, past president of the National Council of Teachers of English

Consider These Facts:

- Reading builds a cognitive processing infrastructure that then "massively influences" every aspect of our thinking, particularly our *crystallized intelligence*—a person's depth and breadth of general knowledge, vocabulary, and the ability to reason using words and numbers. (Stanovich, 2003).

- Children between the ages of 10 and 16 who read for pleasure make more progress not only in vocabulary and spelling but also in math than those who rarely read (Sullivan and Brown, 2013).

- "Omnivorous reading in childhood and adolescence correlates positively with ultimate adult success" (Simonton, 1988).

- Multiple studies have shown that avid readers demonstrate both superior literacy development and wide-ranging knowledge across subjects (Allington, 2012; Hiebert and Reutzel, 2010; Sullivan and Brown, 2013).

- Avid teen readers engage in deep intellectual work and psychological exploration through the books they choose to read themselves (Wilhelm and Smith, 2013).

In addition to increasing intellectual prowess and expanding vocabulary, reading also educates the imagination, "kindling the spirit of creativity in every human heart" (Jago, 2010). And reading fiction, in particular, expands the heart, making us more compassionate (Oatley, 2014).

The Reading Life

We've known for a long time that the best way to help our students succeed is to encourage them to read. To that end, we want our students to discover themselves as readers, to have a sense of their own unique, rich, and wondrous reading lives. What books make their hearts race? What topics do they return to again and again? Dick Robinson, president and CEO of Scholastic, sums it up: "You are what you read." Effective teachers work hard to help their students establish a reading identity that declares, "This is who I am as a reader."

This research compendium aims to showcase decades of reliable reading research to support you in your ultimate aim as an educator and parent: to help all children become proficient, avid readers who bring passion, skill, and a critical eye to every reading encounter (Atwell and Merkel, 2016).

In this way, our students might grow to exemplify and embrace the words of Myra Cohn Livingston, poet, musician, critic, educator, and author:

"Books have more than changed my life—
they have made it possible."

How to Read the Compendium

Start anywhere and read in any direction. Let your interests be your guide.
The compendium is organized around six sections:

- **Readers:** We profile early, adolescent, and boy readers—plus emerging bilinguals, students from diverse backgrounds, and striving readers.

- **Reading:** High-volume readers build an expansive capacity to comprehend what they read. They develop robust vocabularies, deep knowledge of the world, and a proficient, fluid reading style.

- **Equity:** Avid readers are highly engaged and motivated. With stamina, self-efficacy, and a can-do spirit, they understand the joy and power of reading.

- **Texts:** At school and in their homes, all children must have access to abundant texts of all kinds (print and e-books, short texts, magazines, and more). Children also need to develop a sense of genre, text structure, and reading purpose.

- **Teaching:** Students need daily time at school and at home to read and become enthusiastic readers. They also need instructional support such as the interactive read-aloud (reading aloud plus conversation about the book), guided reading, book clubs, and the benefit of writing about reading.

- **Family Literacy:** Families with a rich reading culture—access to books and lots of talk about books—are more likely to raise successful readers.

The compendium does not in any way represent a definitive treatment—the field of reading is vast, varied, and vital. When we investigate reading, we explore cognition, linguistics, psychological influences, and social-cultural traditions.

Instead, the compendium is meant to provide a brief introduction to the benefits of independent reading, or free voluntary reading (Krashen 2011), and suggest some of the pivotal research behind these benefits. It's a place for you to begin your own exploration. As our title suggests, we include both research and expert opinion so the references reflect a range of formats—traditional research reports, as well as newspaper and professional journal articles. Additionally, when appropriate, we link to the Scholastic anthology: *Open a World of Possible: Real Stories About the Joy and Power of Reading,* a collection of essays authored by some of the leading literacy experts in the country (Bridges, 2014).

Depending on the depth of your interest, you may want to use the references we cite as the starting point for a deeper investigation. Note that some of the links are live, enabling you to read the original research online or download a print copy.

Did you know?

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Moll and Bus's 2011 meta-analysis of **99 studies** that focused on the leisure-time reading of preschoolers, kindergarteners, students in **Grades 1–12**, and **college students** found an upward spiral of casualty between print exposure and oral language skills, reading comprehension, and technical reading and spelling.

For each year of reading, students' skills in these domains improved by:

Preschool	Primary Grades	Middle School	High School	College
12%	13%	19%	20%	34%
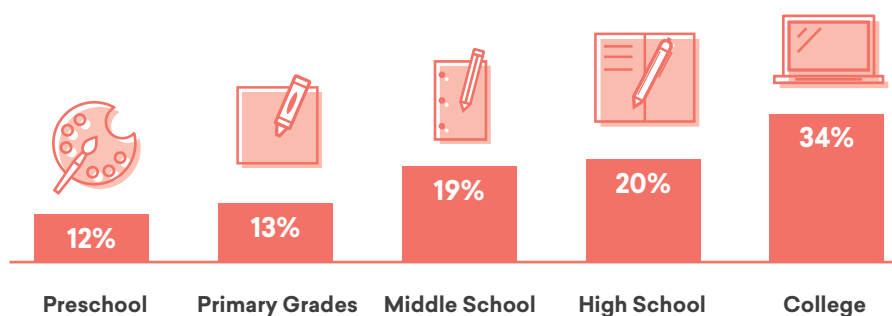
"
Many of the texts I read as a child have been like roadmap markers, showing me a range of life options ... helping me define myself not only as a reader but also as a human being.

—Dr. Alfred Tatum, dean of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Illinois at Chicago

Chapter 1
READERS

- ➤ Early Readers
- ➤ Adolescent Readers
- ➤ Boys
- ➤ Learners of English as an Alternative Language
- ➤ Diverse Learners
- ➤ Striving Readers

EARLY READERS

"Children exposed to lots of books during their early childhood will have an easier time learning to read than those who are not."

—Dr. Henry Bernstein, Harvard Medical School

KEY FINDINGS

➤ "Learning to read represents the weaving together of multiple skills, understandings, and orientations, many of which have their developmental origins in infancy and toddlerhood" (Pinnell, 2018; Rohde, 2015; Snow and Juel, 2005; Pinnell and Fountas, 2011).

➤ The American Academy of Pediatricians (AAP) recommends that pediatricians encourage parents to read aloud daily, ideally multiple times throughout the day, from birth on (2014). As noted in the APP policy, "Those 15-20 minutes spent reading with a child can be the best part of the day. It's a joyful way to build child-parent relationships and set a child on the pathway to developing early literacy skills."

➤ Children who are routinely read to day in and day out—and are immersed in rich talk about books and the various activities in which they are engaged—thrive (AAP, 2014; Cunningham and Zilbulsky, 2014; Needlman, 2006, 2014; Bernstein, 2010).

➤ Children with less exposure to books and talk may face learning challenges in school and beyond (AAP, 2014; Dickinson, McCabe, and Essex, 2006; Neuman and Celano, 2012).

➤ Literacy development is less about a limited critical period and more about "windows of opportunity" that extend across early childhood, culminating perhaps around the age of 10 (Dickinson and Neuman, 2006).

➤ Educators and parents alike should feel a sense of urgency, as experiences with books and reading aloud strengthen the neural systems. These systems, which underlie auditory perceptions, attention, and language, develop rapidly during the first five years of life (AAP, 2014; Dickinson, McCabe, and Essex, 2006; Mol and Bus, 2011; Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014).

➤ Phonemic awareness and letter knowledge are the two best school-entry predictors of how well children will learn to read during the first two years of instruction (National Reading Panel).

➤ To implement systematic phonics instruction, educators must keep the end in mind and ensure that children understand the purpose of learning letter sounds and that they are able to apply these skills accurately and fluently in their daily reading and writing activities. (NRP, 2000).

➤ Reading is superficially visual. "Visually perceived sequences of letters are translated by the brain into sounds, syllables, and words that link encoded language with oral language, so that the words that are read are 'heard' in the mind and connected to their meanings" (Liberman 1999).

➤ To break the code for reading a child must become "phonologically aware" that words can be broken down into smaller units of sounds (phonemes) and that it is these sounds that the letters represent (Tallal, 2012).

More to Know: The Miracle of Early Reading Experiences

Earl Martin Phalen is the CEO of Reach Out and Read, a program that promotes early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms nationwide by giving new books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud. Phalen explains both the advantages of early reading experiences, as well as what is lost when children are deprived:

> *The brain develops faster than any other time between the ages of zero and three. Because of this, it's important to foster literacy during the early stages of life. There's real opportunity in providing parents with books and encouragement to read to their children regularly, sing with their children, and engage their children in conversation— all of which prepares our next generation to be successful in school* (2011).

Literacy development is less about a specific critical period and more about windows of opportunity that extend across early childhood. So even if a child has limited access to language and literacy experiences in the home, there's much ground to be gained through literacy-rich preschool programs, extended day programs, cross-age literacy partners, and the like. During late infancy to late childhood, synaptic density reaches a plateau—this is the period of maximal responsiveness to environmental input (Huttenlocker et al., 2002; Mol and Bus, 2011).

Pam Schiller (2010), an early childhood curriculum specialist, lists six key findings from the imaging technology used in neurobiology and early brain development research:

- The brain of a three-year-old is two and a half times more active than that of an adult.

- Brain development is contingent on a complex interplay between genes and the environment.

- Experiences wire the brain.

- Repetition strengthens the wiring.

- Brain development is nonlinear.

- Early relationships affect wiring.

Again, the "windows of opportunity" suggest especially fertile times when the developing brain is most susceptible to environmental input and most able to "wire skills at an optimal level." Increasingly, we understand that an early, frequent exposure to print has benefits that last a lifetime, including academic success and the prevention of reading challenges later in a child's life (Dickinson, McCabe, and Essex, 2006; Phillips, Norris, and Anderson, 2008). The Mol and Bus (2011) comprehensive meta-analysis of print exposure lends scientific support for the widespread belief that a deep engagement with books and repeated exposure to print have a "long-lasting impact on academic success." Mol and Bus explain:

> Reading development starts before formal instruction, with book sharing as one of the facets of a stimulating home literacy environment. Books provide a meaningful context for learning to read, not only as a way of stimulating reading comprehension but also as a means of developing technical reading skills even in early childhood. In pre-conventional readers, we found that print exposure was associated moderately with oral language and basic knowledge about reading. Reading books remained important for children in school who were conventional readers… Reading routines, which are part of the child's leisure time activities, offer substantial advantages for oral language growth. Interestingly, independent reading of books also enables readers to store specific words from knowledge and become better spellers. Finally, college and university students who read for pleasure may also be more successful academically.

How Literacy Develops and Predicts Later Academic Success

In 2008, the National Institute of Literacy issued a report, *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel*, and, among its many findings, stated that the foundational reading and writing skills that develop from birth to age five have a clear and consistently strong relationship with later conventional literacy skills. Our understanding of the power of early immersion in literacy has only grown. The state of Michigan—guided by Nell Duke's early literacy research (2016)—recommends 10 essential literacy practices that prekindergarten children should experience every day. These include:

1. Intentional use of literacy artifacts in dramatic play throughout the classroom. Reading and writing materials are not only present but used throughout the classroom environment.

2. Read-aloud with reference to print. Daily read-alouds include verbal and nonverbal strategies for drawing children's attention to print.

3. Interactive read-alouds with a comprehension and vocabulary focus. The teacher reads aloud age-appropriate books and other materials, print or digital, including sets of texts that are thematically and conceptually related and texts that are read multiple times.

4. Play with sounds inside words. Teachers help children develop phonological awareness of sounds within language and especially *phonemic awareness*, which involves the ability to segment and blend individual phonemes within words.

5. Brief, clear, explicit instruction in letter names, the sound(s) associated with the letters, and how letters are shaped and formed. Instruction that is effective in fostering development of letter-sound knowledge is supported by tools such as cards with the children's names, alphabet books, and references throughout the day to letters and sounds in the environment.

6. Interactions around writing. Adults engage in deliberate interactions with children around writing. Opportunities for children to write their name as well as informational, narrative, and other texts that are personally meaningful to them are at the heart of writing experiences. These deliberate interactions include interactive writing and scaffolded writing techniques.

7. Extended conversation. Adults initiate open-ended conversations with children, sharing stories of past events and discussing future events.

8. Provision of abundant reading material in the classroom. The classroom includes: a wide range of books and other materials connected to children's interests that reflect their backgrounds and cultural experiences, including class- and child-made books, recorded books, books that children can borrow to bring home and/or access digitally at home, and comfortable places to look at books, frequently visited by the teacher(s) and by adult volunteers recruited to the classroom.

9. Ongoing observation and assessment of children's language and literacy development that informs their education.

Closing Thoughts

Even very young children acquire complex understandings about print when they have been involved with innumerable print encounters and interactions—noticing print in the environment, talking with adults about the functional print they use every day (e.g., the print on kitchen appliances, on food products, on electronic gadgets, and so on), listening to and discussing stories that are read aloud to them from a favorite storybook, playing with language through riddles, rhymes, songs, and so forth (MacPhee, 2018; Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014; Bennett-Armistead, Duke, and Moses, 2005; Harwayne, 2009).

And as they engage with print, young children are not only learning about written language and how it works, they are also learning about the world and how it works. The conceptual knowledge they acquire and the background knowledge they build is cumulative and invaluable.

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ADOLESCENT READERS

"Teenagers want to read—if we let them. Students become committed, passionate readers given the right books, time to read, and regular responses to their reading."

—Penny Kittle, *Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers*

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Young people do more reading and writing today—on paper and online—than ever before, although they may not always read the kind of texts that adults value (International Literacy Association, 2012; Wilhelm and Smith, 2016; Moje et al., 2008).

➤ Teens are reading a wide variety of texts including traditional print text and digital (multimodal) text (International Reading Association, 2014, Moje et al., 2008; Burke, 2013).

➤ Youth use print texts in the context of other activities in their lives—often with social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual purposes (Wilhelm and Smith, 2013; Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Moje et al., 2008).

➤ Adolescent reading and writing practices "foster communication, relationships, and self-expression among peers and family members; support their economic and psychological health; and allow them to construct … identities that offer them power in their everyday lives" (Moje et al., 2008).

➤ Jeff Wilhelm and Michael Smith's research (2013) on the nature and variety of the pleasure avid adolescent readers take from their out-of-school reading demonstrates that pleasure is not incidental to reading—it's essential. The authors explain, "We found that the young people with whom we worked spoke of their reading pleasure with remarkable sophistication—and their pleasure supported the intense and high-level engagement with texts that schools seek to foster."

➤ Effective teachers understand the importance of adolescent choice and ownership, as well as the aim to help teens develop a sense of their own reading lives (Atwell and Merkel, 2016; Wilhelm and Smith, 2016; Kittle, 2013; Miller, 2009; Tatum, 2013; Guthrie, 2008; Gallagher, 2009).

More to Know: Adolescents Crave Social Connection

Early adolescence and the shift to middle school represent a significant milestone for most students. In addition to encountering more demanding literacy challenges across the disciplines, middle school students experience a multi-faceted relationship with reading and writing—both at school and at home.

Adolescents crave social connection. For young teens, literacy is shaped by popular culture, family influences, and relationships with their peers (Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Moje, 2007; Gruwell, 2014). Their texts include logos, music, magazines, websites, and popular and classical literature—as well as the ubiquitous social media.

Engagement is a central force in adolescent literacy learning. It's simple cause and effect: adolescents who see something of value in school reading, read and enjoy academic success. And those who don't, don't read and typically fall behind. John Guthrie, education psychologist and literacy researcher, has been at the forefront of research on reading engagement (2008). From his research and that of others, we know that reading disengagement is more often than not the root cause of school failure and dropouts.

Today's adolescents, given their 24/7 plugged-in status, texting, tweeting, and tinkering with their digital profiles, might claim, "reading is my life." A study by the Pew Research Center (Lenhart, 2015) reports that a "typical teen sends and receives 30 texts per day. For older girls, 15-17, the number climbs to 50 texts a day." What's more, aided by the convenience of smartphones, "92% of teens report going online daily—including 24% who say they go online 'almost constantly.'"

As Krashen (2011) reminds us, all that digital reading and writing represents self-selected "narrow reading," which maximizes language and literacy development. Krashen explains that "narrow reading means focusing on one topic, author, or genre according to the reader's interests." Inviting kids to zero in on texts that hold the greatest interest nearly "guarantees interest and comprehensibility because of the reader's greater background knowledge." Series books represent a kind of narrow reading and often, for this reason, offer a great source of pleasure for young or challenged readers. Over time, narrow readers expand their interests.

What Adolescents Need

In 2012, the International Reading Association (IRA) issued a position paper on adolescent literacy, defining it as "the ability to read, write, understand and interpret, and discuss multiple texts across multiple contexts." The IRA recognizes literacy as flexible and multiple-dimensional; it may manifest as traditional print or fluid digital and appear as a book, instant message, text, video game, or social media, "all of which can be used as tools for understanding content as well as forming social relationships."

Our 21st-century expansive world of literacy requires dynamic instruction to match. The IRA position paper lists the following eight instructional supports that adolescents deserve:

- Content-area teachers who provide instruction in the multiple literacy strategies needed to meet the demands of the specific discipline
- A culture of literacy in their schools with a systematic and comprehensive programmatic approach to increasing literacy achievement for all
- Access to and instruction with multimodal texts
- Differentiated literacy instruction specific to their individual needs
- Opportunities to participate in oral communication when they engage in literacy activities
- Opportunities to use literacy in the pursuit of civic engagement
- Assessments that highlight their strengths and challenges
- Access to a wide variety of print and non-print materials

Closing Thoughts

As the world around us becomes ever more interconnected and complex, the demands on literacy increase. Today's new tools and technologies demand ever-higher levels of processing and performance. Access to high-level literacy is more important than ever. In 2014, Common Sense Media issued "Children, Teens, and Reading," a report suggesting that teens are pulling away from reading. In 1984, 70 percent of 13-year-olds read weekly, compared with 53 percent now. Forty-eight percent of 17-year-olds say they have read for pleasure only once or twice in the last year, according to another study cited in the report. *New Yorker* writer David Denby, musing over the demise of teen reading, offers this humorous spectacle:

> *A common sight in malls, in pizza parlors, in Starbucks, and wherever else American teens hang out: three or four kids, hooded, gathered around a table, leaning over like monks or druids, their eyes fastened to the smartphones held in front of them. The phones, converging at the center of the table, come close to touching. The teens are making a communion of a sort. Looking at them, you can envy their happiness. You can also find yourself wishing them immersed in a different kind of happiness— in a superb book or a series of books, in the reading obsession itself! You should probably keep on wishing.*

Yes, wish for a teacher like Nancie Atwell, Anne Merkel, Michael Smith, or Jeff Wilhelm, all who know teens, know books, and understand the essential role of pleasurable, self-selected reading—and the difference it makes for all readers. High school teachers Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle (2018) sum up their teaching goals for their students:

> *We want to show our students the beauty that reading and writing can bring to their lives. We do not want them to be indifferent; we want them to be empowered and independent, curious, and passionate.*

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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

"The data from our study of boys and reading, in fact, challenge us to rethink our answers to the most fundamental questions we ask as teachers: Why do we teach? What do we teach? How do we teach?"

—Dr. Michael W. Smith and Dr. Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Scholastic's 2016 Kid and Family Reading Report surveyed more than 2,500 U.S. children, aged 6-17, and found that only 52% of boys (versus 72% of girls) said they liked reading books over the summer, while only 27% of boys (versus 37% of girls) said they read books for fun at least five days a week. Forty-five percent of boys (versus only 36% of girls) said they often have trouble finding books they like.

➤ Though these numbers are based on averages—there are boys, of course, who love to read and may be reading above grade level—in general, in elementary school, girls tend to be more verbal and get off to a faster start with reading than boys.

➤ What's more, some boys seem to regard reading as a "feminine activity" and may lack strong male reading models. This is a pattern that persists into adulthood, as according to a 2016 Pew Research Study, "women are more likely to read books than men." Indeed, 32% of men (versus only 23% of women) surveyed said that they hadn't read a single book in the past year.

➤ The standardized NAEP test, known as the nation's report card, indicates that by the senior year of high school, boys have fallen nearly 20 points behind their female peers in reading (Von Drehle, 2007).

➤ However, new evidence suggests that when boys are told that a reading achievement test is a "game" (versus a test of their reading achievement) they actually outscore the girls (Lukits, 2016).

➤ Eighty percent of high-school dropouts are boys, and fewer than 45% of students enrolled in college are young men (Tyre, 2005).

➤ Seventy percent of children diagnosed with learning disabilities are male (Tyre, 2005). This means that boys are more than twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed with learning disabilities.

- In elementary school, boys are twice as likely to be placed in special education classes as girls (Tyre, 2006).

- "More boys than girls are in special education classes. More boys than girls are prescribed mood-managing drugs. This suggests that today's schools are built for girls, and boys are becoming misfits" (Von Drehle, 2007).

- Compared to 2010, in 2012 boys were more likely to think reading books for fun was important (39% in 2010 vs. 47% in 2012), but they still lagged behind girls on this measure (47% for boys in 2012 vs. 56% for girls in 2012) (Scholastic, 2013).

- Among children who have read an e-book, one in five says he or she is reading more books for fun; boys are more likely to agree than girls (26% vs. 16%) (Scholastic, 2013).

More to Know: Boys Lag Academically

When it comes to reading, girls seem to have the jump on boys. According to a 2010 study by the Center on Education Policy, boys are lagging behind girls on standardized reading tests in all 50 states, and in some states, boys are trailing girls by as much as 10 percentage points (although note Lukits's 2016 research and the achievement surge boys demonstrated when they were told that the reading test was a "game"—then they outscored the girls!).

In Virginia and New Hampshire, for example, middle school girls did better than boys in reading proficiency by 15 percentage points. In New York, girls were 13 percentage points ahead. Jack Jennings, the president of the Center on Education Policy, notes, "In the past, boys did not do better in the first couple years of school. Girls did better. But then boys caught up. The difference now is we're finding that boys are not catching up."

Of course, like most things in life, the reason for the reading achievement gap between boys and girls is multifaceted. In *Teenage Boys and High School English*, Bruce Pirie (2002) reminds readers of biological differences—for example, boys tend to develop language skills more slowly than girls. And socially, female teachers and librarians typically shape school reading. For some students, reading may be regarded as a "feminine, passive activity," with boys favoring more rugged and active pastimes such as sports or other outdoor activities. Also, boys may not feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings about the books they read. No question it's complicated, and in fact, Pirie cautions that the challenge is best viewed as a gender continuum: "We must be prepared for the likelihood that strategies intended to help boys will also benefit many girls" (2002).

Additionally, the acceleration of formal academic learning has hurt boys far more than girls: Boys are far more likely to be held back a grade in fourth grade and then again in ninth grade, an action that promotes a suspension rate for boys that is twice as high as that of girls. This in turn leads to a male dropout rate of 32 percent compared to 25 percent for females (Lamm, 2010).

Closing Thoughts

Pam Allyn, author of *Best Books for Boys*, notes that neither boys nor girls thrive with a lack of engaging instruction and curriculum innovation. She suggests:

> *Let's pay attention to the way our children learn best, at home, at school, and in the world. Let's embrace unique learning styles and use them to inform our teaching. Let's give our children options that intrigue them and tap into their natural curiosity. Together we can help every child feel empowered in the classroom and beyond.*

Finally, as children's author Jon Scieszka reminds us, "The good news is that research also shows that boys will read—if they are given reading that interests them."

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LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS AN ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE (EAL)

"Reading in two languages allowed me to fall in love with a different symphony of sounds and rhythms, landscapes, characters, and behaviors. When I began to read in English, I noticed not only a different grammar order, but different life perspectives, too."

—Dr. F. Isabel Campoy, award-winning language scholar and author

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Free voluntary reading or independent reading is one of the most powerful tools we have in language education. Research suggests that the acquisition of English as a second language is enhanced by native language use. Thus, effective teachers, to the extent possible, provide emerging bilinguals with trade books in both languages (Krashen, 2011; Goldenberg, 2011; Freeman et al. 2016).

➤ "Krashen, Lee, and McQuillan (2006) reported that more access to school libraries of at least 500 books was associated with higher reading scores for 10-year-olds in 40 countries, tested in their own language. This result held even when SES was controlled" (Krashen, 2011)

➤ "Educational linguists have developed a theory of bilingualism that has significant implications for teaching emergent bilingual students. The centerpiece of this perspective is that bilingualism is no longer viewed as a mastery of two discrete languages but instead as the ability to strategically and continuously weave in and out of languages depending on the context and audience—a skill linguists call translanguaging" (Garcia and Wei, 2014; Flores, nd).

➤ "Translanguaging is the discursive norm in bilingual families and communities" (Garcia and Wei, 2014). In other words, bilinguals have one linguistic repertoire, and when expressing themselves, draw from all the languages that they possess in order to communicate.

➤ Learning to read in their native language capitalizes on what children already know before their schooling begins. "When children enter school, they are equipped with a working vocabulary and a general ability to communicate in

their mother tongue. By teaching in a language that children speak, think, and understand, they are able to actively engage in the classroom. Children smoothly transition between home and school—their culture and traditional knowledge validated and reinforced in the classroom. After mastering their mother tongue language, children are able to rapidly learn to read and write in a second language" (Dhalla, 2012).

➤ We acquire language when we understand what we hear and what we read—also known as "comprehensible input." The ability to understand and use correct grammar and vocabulary in a second language comes largely from reading and listening. Students pay attention to this linguistic input when it's so compelling that it catches and engages their interest (Crawford and Krashen, 2007; Mah, 2014; Mora, 2014; Moua, 2014; Rami, 2014; Wong Fillmore, 2014).

➤ When new and engaging reading materials were added to classroom libraries, EAL students increased their independent reading and improved their comprehension, oral language development, and vocabulary (Worthy and Roser, 2010; Elley, 1991).

➤ Though students who are learning English as an alternative language can typically learn conversational English in two to three years, it can take five to eight years to master the complex challenges of academic English (Cummins, 2008).

➤ A classroom culture of conversation is essential for all students, but especially so for strivers and students who are just finding their way into English (Echevarria and Goldberg, 2017).

More to Know: Translanguaging and Building on Language Strengths

All students, even those with learning challenges, bring to school a deep knowledge of and facility with their first language. The goal is always to build on linguistic strengths of emerging bilinguals' first language while supporting them as they learn their target language, English. Learning to read in a second language requires a complex interweaving of students' cultural, linguistic, and cognitive development, understanding that all three together are imperative for strong second-language growth (Freeman, et al., 2016).

Language expert Ofelia Garcia explains "translanguaging" as a practice that enables "bilinguals to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire to make sense of their multilingual worlds." Here's a powerful example of translanguaging in action:

> *Moll and his colleagues initiated a series of teaching-learning experiments in which they asked children to read texts in English and then discuss what they had read in Spanish. The results were compelling. Children who appeared to have minimal comprehension of English texts when they were required to discuss these texts in English, revealed rich comprehension when they were allowed to talk about the texts using their native Spanish. Moll and his colleagues worked toward creating a "bilingual zone" in which children were invited to draw on their Spanish-language resources to comprehend and discuss texts they had read in English* (Compton-Lilly, 2014).

As Robert Jiménez of Vanderbilt writes, "The best teachers of English language learners use what they know about literacy and what they know about their students to build reading and writing skills. They learn about the role of reading and writing in different cultures and communities; they use students' backgrounds and linguistic skills as a foundation for learning; and they give their students the tools they need to excel" (2014).

Claude Goldenberg of Stanford agrees that teaching students to read in their first language (L1) promotes higher levels of reading in English; indeed, the research is indisputable. Nearly three dozen experiments and five meta-analyses of the data have been reported since the 1960s, and all reached the same conclusion:

> *Teaching students to read in their first language promotes reading achievement in their target language (L2) in comparison to teaching students to read in the L2 exclusively. The meta-analyses also concluded, not surprisingly, that primary language instruction promotes higher levels of literacy in the primary language* (2011).

It's always important to keep in mind, however, each student's unique learning profile and socio/cultural/economic background. EAL learners vary by age, country of origin, mother tongue, socioeconomic status, and degree of access and exposure to formal schooling. Variations among these factors influence the extent to which instruction practices can favorably impact learning to read in a second language" (Carlo, 2004; Olsen, 2010).

EAL learners need the following:

- **Multiple Entry Points into English** EAL learners benefit when they are able to draw on the full linguistic support of all four language processes—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—and all four language processes should be thoroughly integrated. EAL learners benefit from extensive aural support (read-alouds and audiobooks) as well as multiple opportunities to write. EAL learners should be encouraged to keep a reader's notebook, using it to write about the books they are reading. The full spectrum of linguistic support through multiple language processes enables emerging bilinguals to enjoy and make sense of the grade-level books they are reading (Gibbons, 2009).

- **Supports for Academic Vocabulary Acquisition** What about all-important vocabulary? Second-language researcher Diane August (2006) notes the value of the interactive read-aloud as a key instructional strategy that supports the acquisition of linguistic skills by EAL learners. Vocabulary is primarily acquired incidentally, through listening, speaking, and reading (Wong-Fillmore, 2014; Graves, 2006). Thus, teachers need to immerse students in rich language environments where students have many opportunities to use their target language (English) to learn rich content.

  – Interactive shared reading successfully supports EAL learners as well as native English speakers (Silverman, 2007). It exposes students to rich book language and powerful vocabulary. Though many studies have been conducted with young children, there is evidence that this technique can be effective with older learners as well (Brabham and Lynch-Brown, 2002).

  – Duke, et al. (2011) cite the high correlation between academic vocabulary and comprehension and offer several strategies that students can use to lock down the meaning of more sophisticated content words. These strategies include relating words to themes and to other similar words. These word associations help build networks of meaning that support reading comprehension.

- **Thematic Networks of Meaning** EAL learners benefit immeasurably from thematic text sets that spiral in difficulty over the course of each school year, as well as across grade levels (Freeman et al. 2016). Reading multiple texts on the same theme automatically fosters close reading and deepens and refines subject knowledge. As noted by literacy researcher Peter Johnston, "To understand a text deeply, we need multiple perspectives. To understand a subject, idea, or concept more deeply, we need multiple texts because each text offers another author's perspective on the subject" (2009).

- **Narrow Reading** Related to thematic text sets is the concept of "narrow reading." In narrow reading, students read multiple texts more narrowly focused on a specific topic rather than a more expansive theme "to delve deeply into a relevant issue" so that "key concepts and related high-utility words and phrases" are recycled, "consolidating students' background while increasing repetitive word knowledge" (Krashen, 2004). The relationship between a given text and the texts surrounding it is often known by the term "intertextuality." As readers finish one book in either a narrow or thematically related text set, they experience intertextuality as progressively broadening knowledge. Each book offers a literacy experience that builds on the previous one, providing a network of support for all students. This support is especially helpful for students who are learning English as an alternative language as they explore key themes or more specific topics across multiple texts, encountering similar vocabulary and understandings that make it easier to learn and retain new material. EAL learners get a leg up by developing the all-important background knowledge that enables them to comprehend new books.

Evidence-Based Writing

Inviting EAL learners to write—which consolidates their views and understandings—also helps drive their reading comprehension. Additionally, students learn to synthesize information in their own words and use the text as the basis for putting forth an argument or opinion, all of which provides EAL learners with invaluable support (Neuman and Roskos, 2012). Evidence-based writing calls on students to use passages from the text to support their opinions, summations, and conclusions. Graham and Herbert (2010) and Graham and Perin (2007) note that writing about a text enables students to crack it open and construct meaning and knowledge in more effective and precise ways than would be possible if they were simply reading and rereading the text, or reading and discussing it.

Reading as the Best Support for EAL Learners

In their classic study, Elley and Mangubhai (1983) found that reading significantly increased the achievement of children. They studied 614 children (380 in the experimental groups and 234 in the control group) in fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms in rural Fiji schools with very few books. The researchers provided 250 high-interest illustrated storybooks in English per classroom to the experimental groups. The control group continued to use the ongoing English language program that put little emphasis on reading. Eight of the 16 experimental classrooms had sustained silent reading (time set aside in class for children to read books of their choice). The other eight experimental classrooms had the shared book experience (also called shared reading, a teaching technique where the teacher points to the print in full view of the children while reading to them). They found that after eight months, the pupils in the two experimental groups progressed in reading comprehension at twice the rate of the comparison group.

Closing Thoughts

When linguistic diversity is regarded and acted on as a resource for teaching and learning, students thrive (Borrero and Bird, 2009). Students who are learning English as an alternative language learn how to create meaning, communicate that meaning, and extend meaning—in two or more languages—in ways that engage their intellectual abilities and promote both academic and lifelong success. And again and again, the research shows that one of the most efficient and effective ways to support EAL learners is through wide, extensive reading.

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DIVERSE LEARNERS

"By 2035, students of color will be a majority in our schools. With increasing populations of children of immigrant and migrant families expanding the presence of cultural diversity in schools … teachers must adjust curriculum, materials, and support to ensure that each student has equity of access to high quality learning."

—Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson, University of Virginia

KEY FINDINGS

- "Half of U.S. children under age five are non-white. But only 10 percent of children's books in the last two decades featured multicultural characters. The math doesn't add up" (Hart, 2017).

- "Culturally responsive teaching" means using the "cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002).

- Django Paris (2012) explains that "culturally sustaining pedagogy fosters linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of democratic schooling." To counter the policies and practices that create a monocultural and monolingual society we need equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and equality.

- Trade books are powerful instructional tools for both celebrating and supporting diverse learning styles and perspectives (Draper, 2014; Haddix, 2014; Parker, 2014; Siu-Runyan, 2014; Sumida, 2014; Tatum, 2014).

- In our increasingly diverse nation and interconnected world, students need global awareness and a deep understanding of, and respect for cultural equity and diversity. We're called upon to help our students understand other perspectives and cultures (Miller and Sharp, 2017; ILA, NCTE 2014).

- Literature has always played a pivotal role in helping our students transcend boundaries created by ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences. "Literature helps children develop their cultural identities as it allows them to understand and appreciate the cultures of others." It's often the first step toward "eliminating stereotyping and prejudice and helping students develop cultural identity" (Craft Al-Hazza and Bucher, 2008).

- In "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," Professor Rudine Sims Bishop writes, "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" (1990).

- "One important goal is for literature to offer readers a realistic and authentic mirror of their own lives and experiences. If children recognize themselves reflected accurately and sympathetically in the books they read, they may develop positive self-images and sense of worth" (Lehman, Freeman, and Scharer, 2010).

- "Writing [is] a means to make sense of and critically shape [one's] multiple identities" (Muhammad, 2015).

- "It becomes vital to not simply advise the next generation of scholars, but to also mentor them in ways that help to cultivate their minds so they are prepared to use their voices in powerful ways to improve and advance the state of educational progress." (Muhammad, 2015).

More to Know: Value Students' Literate Experiences

Typically, school literacy centers around reading, writing, listening, and speaking—and traditional texts and textbooks. Spears-Bunton and Powell (2009) suggest that this view of literacy is narrow; as a result, students who experience alternative literate experiences in their homes and communities—which aren't valued by the school—may be viewed as "at risk."

For example, though some children may not routinely enjoy a bedtime story, they may participate in a rich, complex literate experience in their church and choir. It's essential that educators work to understand and value the literate experiences every child brings to school. As Phyllis Hunter (2012) reminds us:

> *What do we consider reading? If we're talking* Hamlet *or the Federalist Papers, kids may not be reading as much. But if we recognize the time they spend on the Internet and with social media as opportunities for reading and writing, then the number of minutes kids these days spend on both is not declining.*

Effective teachers of reading understand that children from culturally diverse backgrounds learn best when the classroom environment is respectful of their linguistic, social, and cultural heritage. These teachers surround their students with culturally appropriate and relevant trade books that capitalize on the background knowledge and experiences that their students bring to school. By connecting these children with meaningful, culturally responsive books, they can relate to, teachers validate and build on their students' cultural and world knowledge. For this reason, the literacy director of Chicago Public Schools, Jane Fleming, maintains that we need more books that depict positive images of urban life to engage our growing populations of urban students and bolster their literacy development (Fleming et al., 2016).

In this poignant example, trade author Jewell Parker Rhodes (2015) helps us understand the need for books that reflect all the children in a class:

> *I was a junior at Carnegie Mellon when I saw, on the library's new fiction shelf, Gayl Jones's* Corregidora. *Black women wrote books? It was a revelation. I switched my major the very next day. In my creative writing class, I was the only person of color. My classmates would say, "Why didn't you tell me your characters were black?" "Why didn't you tell me yours were white?" But truth be told, the experience confirmed that I, too, "read white" unless an author told me differently.*

A rich classroom collection of culturally responsive trade books acknowledges the background experience of culturally diverse students, bridges the gap between home and school, and enhances their engagement in reading. As Lehman, Freeman, and Scharer note, "As technology advances and opportunities for global communication expand, the value and importance of international children's books will continue to grow" (2009).

Dr. Alfred Tatum promotes what he calls enabling texts, books that are deeply significant and meaningful to all adolescents, but especially important for our diverse students living in high poverty urban environments. Enabling texts, at times authored by writers who have overcome adversity themselves, form a textual lineage that speaks to the rich possibilities of a life both thoughtful and well lived. Tatum believes these books offer their readers a roadmap to life as they strive to develop their own "plan of action" and a "healthy psyche" (Tatum, 2009).

Drawing from his work with disengaged adolescents in Chicago, Tatum saw the need for texts that were provocative and relevant, stories that spoke to the essential questions of students' lives. He also insisted that his students write, not just to develop skills, but as a process of self-discovery and a means of empowerment across four intellectual platforms that enable students to think deeply about their own human development. As he says, "It's not just about literacy. It's about their lives" (2009, 2013).

- **Define Self:** What are your passions, your values, and your goals?
- **Become Resilient:** How do you stay strong when life puts obstacles in your way?
- **Engage with Others:** How do you work with other people to make a difference?
- **Build Capacity:** What can you do to make the world a better place?

Closing Thoughts

Phyllis Hunter (2012) writes, "Every child should find her or himself in the pages of a book." As teachers work to bring in culturally responsive children's and YA books that will appeal to their diverse classrooms, they would do well to ask the following of each book they are considering. Does this book:

- Reflect the values, strengths, and ideals that a cultural group considers vital?
- Accurately represent the characters' countries of origin?
- Address complex issues with sensitivity and nuance?
- Portray characters as problem-solvers?
- Feature the diversity most typical in different regional areas?

By bringing the world into our classrooms and homes through culturally responsive literature, we open windows of understanding (Draper, 2014; Dybdah and Ongtooguk, 2014; Haddix, 2014; Parker, 2014).

We have the power to know more through the books we read and through the stories we hear. And as educators, we also have the power to change what our students know. We can bring books to our students that will push them beyond their limits and out into understanding the world as it truly exists. We can give them access to more empathy and more understanding by giving them access to the kinds of books that accurately represent the diversity of the people with whom we share this world (Lifshitz, 2018).

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STRIVING READERS

"There's no such thing as a kid who hates reading. There are just kids who love reading, and kids who are reading the wrong books. We need to help them find the right books."

—James Patterson, award-winning novelist and founder of ReadKiddoRead

KEY FINDINGS

➤ "Children must have easy—literally fingertip—access to authentic texts that provide engaging, successful reading experiences throughout the calendar year if we want them to read in volume (Klein, 2018; Johnston, 2010).

➤ Authentic texts—unlike contrived texts that are put together to teach a skill—allow students to think and feel about what they read. Students discover favorite books while developing a love for reading. In addition to the benefits of motivating learners, arousing their interest, and exposing them to the language that they will encounter in the real world, authentic materials enable successful language learning (Bridges, 2018; Miller and Sharp, 2018; Klein, 2018; Scharer et al., 2018; Harvey and Ward, 2017).

➤ Teachers play a pivotal role in helping their students find the will to read and the thrill of succeeding (Duke et al., 2011). Successful teachers, without fail, do three things:

- Provide their students with the instructional scaffolding they need to succeed—most effectively delivered in small group or one on one (Richardson and Lewis, 2018; Scharer et al., 2018; Harvey and Ward, 2017).

- Match their students with books that they can read with enjoyment and deep comprehension (Klein, 2018; Harvey and Ward, 2017). Hooking students with terrific content isn't just fun—it's the key to our students' success. As Duke, Pearson, and Billman (2011) remind us, "Motivation is highly correlated with learning in general and reading comprehension, in particular."

- Balance text complexity with task complexity. When students tackle a new genre, structure, or topic, provide more scaffolding for the complex text but also set an easier reading response task for them. If students are reading their preferred genre or reading about their favorite topic, challenge them to read a book at a higher text level but also suggest they take on a more challenging reader's response task (Klein, 2017).

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Students, even those who find reading challenging, thrive in classrooms that are filled with books at different levels, where the teacher celebrates books—creating colorful book displays and giving book talks that promote favorite titles—and students are given the choice of what they read, as well as time and support to read it (Miller and Sharp, 2018; Scharer et al. 2018; Allington, 2012).

➤ Walczyk and Griffin-Ross (2007) found that striving readers benefit from some say in what they read and how they read it. In other words, they benefit when they are allowed to choose books they want to read, slow down their reading, and implement compensatory strategies, such as reading out loud, back tracking and rereading, pausing, skipping words they don't know, using onset rime patterns (Zinke, 2017), analogizing to a known word, or using context to predict what word might come next (Hiebert, 2018).

➤ Guthrie (2004), commenting on the results of two large national and international sets of data examining the relationship between reading engagement and achievement, writes, "Based on this massive sample, this finding suggests the stunning conclusion that engaged reading can overcome traditional barriers to reading achievement, including gender, parental education, and income."

➤ The Kids Count report *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters* makes clear what's at stake when primary students fail to thrive as confident readers: "Reading proficiently by the end of third grade (as measured by NAEP at the beginning of fourth grade) can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child's educational development" (2010).

➤ Researchers Catherine Snow et al. maintain that "academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing a student's reading skill at the end of third grade. A child who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from high school" (1998).

➤ Students who are assigned to the "slow" reading group often feel stupid. "Our first experience with reading influences our perceptions of our intelligence, even as adults …If you ask an adult, 'Do you consider yourself above average, about average, or below average?' most of them have a clear picture of where they fall on the intelligence spectrum—based on the years when they were learning to read" (Johnson, 2011).

KEY FINDINGS

- McGill-Franzen et al. (2016) showcase the research of Rosalie Fink (1995, 1997), who demonstrated that curiosity and a "pursuit of passionate interests" can drive the kind of reading practice that ultimately helps even so-called dyslexics overcome reading challenges. Fink interviewed 60 highly successful adult professionals who attended prestigious universities and became award-winning scientists, professors in medicine, neuroscientists, and lawyers, and yet as children all had been identified as dyslexic. Nevertheless, all became accomplished professionals by immersing themselves in "massive amounts of technical reading" about their topic of interest. In the process, these striving readers developed:

  - "Deep background knowledge, schema familiarity, and contextual understanding. Familiarity with domain-specific vocabulary, themes, and typical text structures provided the scaffolds that supported their development of increasingly sophisticated literacy skills" (Fink, 1997; cited in Franzen, 2016)."

- In a similar fashion, Krashen (2011) promotes "narrow reading"—the practice of delving deeply into a particular topic of interest, and scaffolded by the familiar vocabulary, text structures, and concepts, consuming vast qualities of texts with relative ease.

- Although some children may require more intense reading interventions, focused instruction in English, and/or special education services, all children need and deserve an active reading life fueled by caring teachers (Harvey and Ward, 2017; Beers and Probst, 2017; Howard, 2018; Routman, 2018).

More to Know: Successful Reading by Third Grade

Failure to achieve reading proficiency by third grade disproportionately affects children from high-poverty households and communities. Typically, this developmental lag is the result of differences in resources and opportunities for healthy physical, linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development. Children who live with the challenges of poverty have a higher incidence of health problems that interfere with learning, and, what's more, as their parents work overtime to put food on the table, they may miss rich book-based verbal interactions with their families (Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014), access to books (Neuman and Celano, 2001, 2012), and the daily read-aloud (Adams, 1990).

In her seminal *Beginning to Read* (1990), Marilyn Adams notes that children from families of means often arrive at school with 1,000 hours of read-aloud time under their belts. In stark contrast, children from high-poverty households may not have experienced a single read-aloud—or, if they have, it more typically adds up to just 25 hours' worth.

In his 2012 study, "Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation," researcher Donald Hernandez notes that third grade is a pivotal point: "If you haven't succeeded by third grade it's more difficult to [remediate] than it would have been if you started before then." Drawing from the data of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' National Longitudinal Study of Youth, Dr. Hernandez examined the reading scores and later graduation rates of 3,975 students born between 1979 and 1989. His findings, as reported in the Annie B. Casey Report, are convincing:

> "He found 16 percent overall did not have a diploma by age 19, but students who struggled with reading in early elementary school grew up to comprise 88 percent of those who did not receive a diploma. That made low reading skills an even stronger predictor than spending at least a year in poverty, which affected 70 percent of the students who didn't graduate. In fact, 89 percent of students in poverty who did read on level by third grade graduated on time, statistically no different from the students who never experienced poverty but did struggle with reading early on. By contrast, more than one in four poor, struggling readers did not graduate, compared with only two percent of good readers from wealthier backgrounds. Mr. Hernandez found that gaps in graduation rates among white, black, and Hispanic students closed once poverty and reading proficiency were taken into account. "If they are proficient in reading, they basically have the same rate of graduation," above 90 percent, Mr. Hernandez said. "'If they did not reach proficiency, that's when you see these big gaps emerge.'"

The best way to prevent failure to thrive as a proficient reader is to marshal the support of all involved: families, schools, and communities (Mapp et al, 2017). When everyone works together to give children meaningful literacy experiences and closely monitor their progress, students are more likely to enter the third grade as confident, capable readers who will continue to excel in school and graduate from high school. Early literacy, in other words, is the gift that keeps on giving, providing benefits that extend well beyond the primary grades and carrying students all the way through a successful school career to on-time high school graduation.

Books and Strategic Intervention for Reluctant Readers

"When classroom teachers provided students with easy access to a wide range of interesting texts, the effects on comprehension and motivation to read were enormous."

—Richard Allington

Response to Intervention (RTI) originated in 2004 with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). THough its intent was noble—to provide a thoughtful program of sensitive support for striving readers inside the comfort of their own classrooms—it has, as outlined by Sparks (2015), failed to live up to its promise. It seems that the line between core instruction (Tier I) and intervention (Tier II) has been blurred—with too many children targeted for intervention and thus deprived of what they most need: meaning-focused, uninterrupted time with books they love to read.

Easy Access to Good Books

Getting the right books into kids' hands is the key that opens the way to strategic intervention that works (Klein, 2018; Richardson and Lewis, 2018; Harvey and Ward, 2017; Howard, 2018), as well as the ultimate goal—high volume, engaged readers (Guthrie, 2008). In *What Really Matters in Response to Intervention* (2012), Allington reports on the striking findings of Guthrie and Humenick (2004): "When classrooms provided students with easy access to a wide range of interesting text, the effects on comprehension and motivation to read were enormous." Easy access to books that students enjoyed reading had a profound impact on both reading comprehension (effect size 1.6) and motivation to read (effect size 1.5). To put this in perspective, an effect size of 1.0 moves achievement from the 16th to the 50th percentile rank. That's hugely significant. As Allington notes, "No other features of classroom instruction were as powerful in improving both reading comprehension and motivation."

Guthrie (2008) explains in no uncertain terms what's needed to help older striving readers:

> *In the end, if we truly want struggling readers to improve their reading skills, schools and teachers must take drastic measures. School districts must begin to put money into texts. By allocating funds for high-interest books and by adjusting curricula to allow for the teaching of such novels, they can take the first step in this important process. Individual teachers must recognize that it is more beneficial to have every student in a class reading a book—despite its content and reading level—than it is to teach Shakespeare's* Julius Caesar *to half of a class while the other half becomes more certain that reading is not for them..*

Karen Tankersley (2005) notes that by the time striving readers enter middle school, they have endured many years of frustration and failure. As a result, they are often "skilled evaders who try to either 'hide out or act out' so they can avoid reading in front of their peers." They also typically suffer from a crushing lack of self-confidence with little motivation to engage in an activity that they associate with embarrassment and failure.

Motivation is highest when students feel competent, have sufficient autonomy, set worthwhile goals, receive specific feedback, and are affirmed by others (Harvey and Ward, 2017). Conversely, learning theorists John Hattie and Gregory Yates (2013) maintain that when students suffer "public humiliation, devastating test results, conflicts with teachers or peers, and ability grouping with very little chance of promotion," they are likely to feel deflated and disengage with the work at hand with self-destructive results (Johnson, 2011).

As researcher John Guthrie (2008) reminds us, "Reading engagement and reading achievement interact in a spiral. Higher achievers read more, and the more engaged these students become, the higher they achieve. Likewise, lower achievers read less, and the less engaged decline in achievement." It's the Matthew Effect—the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (Stanovich, 1986). For this reason, it's imperative to maintain the highest expectations for all students and provide the exemplary instruction and rich, wide-ranging content that fosters intellectual curiosity and enables all students to achieve high academic and personal success.

To this end, reluctant readers often thrive with thematically related text sets or series books. Students benefit from reading across a set of books that are conceptually linked; text sets or series books about the same set of characters automatically create a network of shared meaning that serves as a safety net for those students most in need. They more easily learn the big ideas and shared vocabulary related to a specific unit of study, and that, in turn, enables them to more easily read, write, and talk about the books they are reading. Ultimately, dramatically increasing the volume of free voluntary reading by striving readers—providing the books and magazines that will catch their attention and lure them into reading, and providing the instructional scaffolding they need to move forward with confidence—is the best way to help them overcome their challenges (Howard, 2018; Klein, 2018; Richardson and Lewis, 2018; Harvey and Ward, 2017).

Closing Thoughts

Learning to read is typically defined as learning to control a specific set of skills. And though it's certainly true that children must learn to orchestrate a complex set of strategic actions that enable comprehension, it's equally true that learning to read is a social-cultural event. In other words, learning to read is more than simple skill building. Children become readers when they are immersed in a community of readers, surrounded by rich book talk and animated demonstrations of reading, and provided with the social-emotional support that enables them to develop identities as readers and become members of the "literacy club" (Smith, 1987; Allyn and Morrell, 2016; Harvey and Ward, 2017). Thus, at the same time we're helping students acquire the technical skills necessary for proficient reading, we also work to help children develop the confidence to take the risks needed to propel their learning. Learning to read, like any human endeavor, requires practice, perseverance, and persistence to push through the challenges to proficiency.

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Did you know?

If teachers followed the guidelines in third-grade core reading program implementation guides...

how much **reading practice** would kids actually get?

The mean reading volume of these programs was about...

15 minutes a day

or

17% of the time

allotted for a 90-minute reading/ELA block.

" Reading for me is like DNA woven into the strands of my life.

—Marva Allen, Novelist, Hue-man Book Store Owner

Chapter 2
READING

- Volume, Stamina, and Avid, Independent Reading

- Comprehension

- Background Knowledge

- Vocabulary

- Fluency

VOLUME, STAMINA, AND AVID, INDEPENDENT READING

"The amount and frequency with which one reads, or one's reading volume, has profound implications for the development of a wide variety of cognitive capabilities, including verbal ability and general knowledge."

—Dr. Anne Cunningham and Dr. Jamie Zibulsky, *Book Smart: How to Develop and Support Successful, Motivated Readers*

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Volume of reading is critical in the development of reading proficiency (Johnston, 2011). Volume is defined as a combination of the time students spend reading plus the numbers of words they actually consume as they read (Miller and Sharp, 2018; Beers and Probst, 2017; Harvey and Ward, 2017; Allington, 2012; Guthrie, 2004).

➤ The U.S. Dept. of Education (2005) maintains that avid, independent reading is a widely recognized precursor to:

- Better skills acquisition
- Superior grades
- Desirable life related to income, profession, employment, and other attributes

➤ It is during independent reading practice that students consolidate their reading skills and strategies and come to own them. Without extensive reading practice, reading proficiency lags (Scharer, 2018; Harvey and Ward, 2017; Allington, 2012; Hiebert, 2014; Krashen, 2011).

➤ Students who read widely and frequently are higher achievers than students who read narrowly and rarely regardless of their family income; so students from lower income families who read a lot score higher on reading achievement tests than do their more privileged peers who don't read (Guthrie 2012; Brozo, et al., 2008).

➤ "Independent reading is an essential practice, one that develops background knowledge, improves fluency and comprehension, heightens motivation, increases reading achievement, and helps students broaden their vocabulary (Miller and Sharp, 2018; Harvey and Ward, 2017; Miller and Moss, 2013).

➤ The volume of independent, silent reading that students do in school is significantly related to gains in reading achievement. (Swan, Coddington, Guthrie, 2010; Hiebert and Reutzel, 2010; Cunningham and Stanovich, 2003).

KEY FINDINGS

➤ "Students who read a lot score better on every imaginable test—the NAEP, the SAT, and the ACT. One of the best ways of doing this is to allow students to read habitually, and in ways that literate people the world over read … Watch your strong readers. What is one factor they all have in common? They read a lot" (Calkins, et al., 2012).

➤ "Most American students do not read a great deal. In the typical classroom, students spend less than 20% of the reading/language arts block reading" (Brenner and Hiebert, 2010). "Even a little more reading time can go a long way. In fact, as little as an additional seven minutes of reading per day has been shown to differentiate classrooms in which students read well from those in which students read less well" (Kuhn and Schwanenflugel, 2009; cited in Hiebert, 2014).

➤ "Frequent readers are defined as children who read for fun five to seven days a week. Frequent readers ages 12-17 read an average of 39.6 books a year, while infrequent readers in this age group read an average of only 4.7 books a year

➤ There are three powerful factors that can predict whether a child across ages 6-17 will be a frequent reader:

- Children's level of reading enjoyment
- Parents who are frequent readers
- A child's belief that reading for fun is important

Additional factors predict reading frequency for students ages 6-11 include:

- Being read aloud to 5-7 days a week before kindergarten
- Being read aloud to currently
- Spending less online computer time

Predictors for kids ages 12-17 include:

- Having time for independent reading during the school day
- Reading more since starting to read e-books
- Having 150 or more print books in the home
  (Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report: Fifth Edition)

➤ Reading stamina refers to students' ability to focus, engage with texts, and read independently for periods of time without being distracted. "A strong silent reading habit (of which stamina is a part) depends on the experiences that their teachers provide them. …If students haven't had the kind of support that develops solid silent reading habits by the time that they are in third grade, changing direction and developing appropriate habits may require instructional programs that are particularly well designed" (Hiebert, 2014).

More to Know: Proficient Readers Read a Lot

When it comes to the role of books and reading in increasing reading achievement, the facts are indisputable. Extensive and intensive reading—also known as avid, high-volume reading—supports not only high scores on reading achievement tests, but also a fulfilling and productive life. "For the majority of young people, enthusiastic and habitual reading is the single most predictive personal habit for the ability to achieve desirable life outcomes" (Bayless, 2010). Effective and enthusiastic reading does, as Dick Robinson maintains, "create a better life."

Avid, voluminous reading (Atwell and Merkel, 2016) is the most reliable path to the development of proficient readers; indeed, there's no other way to become a proficient reader. No matter what we're trying to get proficient at—ping-pong, programming, or paddle boarding, we have to practice for many, many hours. No surprise, then, that students who read voluntarily and extensively both at school and at home become proficient readers. Indeed, research demonstrates a strong correlation between high reading achievement and hours logged inside a book. Effective reading programs include time for independent reading of a wide variety of reading materials, including abundant trade books across genres (Harvey and Ward, 2017; Scharer et al., 2018).

How important are time and engagement with books? The difference they make is nothing short of miraculous—engaged readers spend 500 percent more time reading than do their peers who aren't yet hooked on books—and all those extra hours inside books they love gives them a leg up in everything that leads to a happy, productive life: deep conceptual understanding of a wide range of topics, expanded vocabulary, strategic reading ability, critical literacy skills, and engagement with the world that's more likely to make them dynamic citizens drawn into full civic participation. As Mary Leonhart, author of *99 Ways to Get Kids to Love Reading* (1997), notes:

> *The sophisticated skills demanded by high-level academic or professional work—the ability to understand multiple plots or complex issues, a sensitivity to tone, the expertise to know immediately what is crucial to a text and what can be skimmed—can be acquired only through years of avid reading."*

Elfrieda Hiebert and D. Ray Reutzel (2010) note that the opportunity to read (OTR) is associated with literacy performance:

> *Foorman et al. (2006) used hierarchical linear modeling to examine the relationship between various instructional practices and the impact on reading achievement for 1,285 first-graders. Time allocated to reading was the only variable that significantly explained gains on any of the post-test measures, including word reading, decoding, and passage comprehension. Other time factors, such as time spent on word, alphabetic instruction, and phonemic awareness instruction, did not independently contribute to growth in reading achievement.*

Although the best predictor of reading success is the actual time students spend inside books, reading achievement is also influenced by the diversity of their reading. Avid readers are well acquainted with the joys of a good novel, but they also enjoy reading for a variety of purposes—exploring informational texts, absorbing information to perform a task, or sharing poetic texts through a range of social media (Beers and Probst, 2017).

Sixth-grade teacher Donalyn Miller asks her students to read 40 books a year. Many of them read more than the required 40, and her classroom, bursting at the seams with her wrap-around-the-classroom-and-out-the-door library (Donalyn stores her overflow books in a storage closet across the hall from her classroom), fosters both avid reading and outstanding test scores. In *The Book Whisperer* (2009), which chronicles her dedication to classroom libraries, student reading choice, and independent reading, Miller describes an instance during one of her speaking engagements when she was asked by a skeptical audience member how she can justify to her principal the hours of class time she dedicates to students' reading. Her answer was simple: she showed her students' outstanding test scores. But she also explains: "Pointing to my students' test scores garnered gasps from around the room, but focusing on test scores or the numbers of books my students read does not tell the whole story …You see, my students are not just strong, capable readers; they love books and reading."

In a classic 1988 study, "Time Spent Reading and Reading Growth," Taylor, Frye, and Maruyama found that the amount of time children spend reading is significantly related to their gains in reading achievement. They asked 195 fifth- and sixth-grade children to keep daily logs of their reading at home and at school over a four-month period. They found that the amount of time spent reading during reading period in school contributed significantly to gains in students' reading achievement as measured by reading comprehension scores on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test ($p<.039$), while time spent reading at home approached significance (p.068).

Brandon Dixon, a Harvard sophomore and winner of the Gates Millennium Scholarship, attributes much of his academic success to his voluminous reading. Brandon grew up in low-income household, the son of a single mother, who encouraged him to read daily and work hard. Dixon (2015) writes:

> When I answer the question, "How did you get smart?" by pointing to a long list of books I have read since I began devouring them sometime around second grade, [my peers] give me incredulous glances and sneer at the concept of "simple reading" being the key to academic success. It is a shame that they do not believe me, because when I examine my intellectual growth throughout the past 12 years, I credit more than 50% of my knowledge to what I gleaned while reading a book.

In one of the most extensive studies of independent reading yet conducted, Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) traced reading growth to an array of activities related to independent reading. They found that the amount of time students spent in independent reading was the best predictor of reading achievement and also the best predictor of the amount of gain in reading achievement made by students between second and fifth grade.

Miller and Moss (2013) explain the key finding: students who read independently an hour a day scored at the 98th percentile on standardized tests, while students who read only 4.6 minutes daily scored at the 50th percentile, and students who did no out-of-school reading scored at the second percentile.

Variation in Amount of Independent Reading
(Readers and Words per Year)

Percentile For Amount of Reading	Minutes of Reading per Day	Words Read per Year
98	67	4,733,000
90	33	2,357,000
80	25	1,697,000
70	17	1,168,000
60	13	722,000
50	9	601,000
40	6	421,000
30	4	251,000
20	2	134,000
10	1	51,000
2	0	8,000

Three Reading Stances: Responsive, Responsible, and Compassionate

Beers and Probst (2017) suggest that for every text we read, we assume three stances: the responsive reader, the responsible reader, and the compassionate reader.

- **Responsive** When the text matters to us, when it influences our world somehow, we are on our way to becoming responsive readers. But the text won't matter to us unless it touches us emotionally and intellectually. We readers must be aware not only of the text, but also of the effects that the text has upon us. When we pay attention in this way we are acting as responsive readers.

- **Responsible** In a book study, we necessarily pay close attention to the text. But the responsibility we show when attending to the text implies and requires a responsibility to ourselves as well. That responsibility consists not only of a willingness to acknowledge and defend our own thoughts and values, but also to change our thinking when evidence or reason dictates.

- **Compassionate** Developing more compassionate citizens is a desirable goal in general. But we also think that compassion is a necessary characteristic of readers. The more compassionate our students are, the more likely they will be able to read well. Why? Compassion sharpens the reader's ability to see other points of view and other perspectives, and to imagine the feelings of those who hold them. It should enable readers to take, if only momentarily, the standpoint of someone else and thus better understand his or her motivations and thinking.

But for that to happen, we must be willing to enter the text with an open heart and mind, even if we suspect that it contains ideas we're predisposed to reject. And by entering into a dialogue with the text, we learn how to enter into conversations with those who confirm our thinking, offer us another perspective, or present us with an idea we may be reluctant to hear, but may change us in some way.

Closing Thoughts

To grow as readers, students need to read a lot—both at school and at home (children spend the majority of their time outside of school, and those hours should be filled with reading). For those who engage in voluminous reading, the benefits are immeasurable. Avid readers:

- **Expand their vocabularies**—Learn thousands of new words incidentally through reading. Students with robust vocabularies are successful readers and learners.

- **Deepen and broaden their background knowledge and expand their capacity to comprehend**—Read more, learn more, know more—and thus, comprehend more with every book they read. Voluminous reading puts children on an upward spiral for continuous growth.

- **Become fluent readers**—Learn the music of language—phrasing, prosody, rhythm, and rate.

- **Develop awareness of text structure and format**—Become familiar with different kinds of genres, both literary and informational, as well as the structure, format, and elements of texts; learn that genre serves the purpose of the text.

- **Master the foundational conventions of language**—Develop critical understandings about how written language is organized and assembled: letters, sounds, and how they work together to create the sound system of written language.

- **Absorb critical information about how to write**—Learn to write and control all the foundational skills such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation—every time students open the pages of a book they receive a lesson in how to structure a sentence, a paragraph, or a whole texts, how to begin a piece and end it. It's no surprise that our best writers are also our strongest readers.

- **Know themselves as readers**—Build rich reading lives. Students who are readers can talk about their favorite authors, topics, themes, and genres. They understand the joy of reading, deeply and profoundly.

- **Become confident readers with a growth mindset**—Develop a can-do spirit and growth mindset about their reading abilities. It's easy to feel confident and believe in yourself as a capable learner when you're supported by the wide-ranging knowledge that reading makes possible.

- **Achieve the goals of higher ELA standards**—Meet the goals of rigorous English language arts standards and beyond; avid readers do all that and more with every book they read.

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COMPREHENSION

"The more that you read, the more things you will know.
The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

—Dr. Seuss

<div style="background-color:#8a4dab;color:white;text-align:center;font-weight:bold">KEY FINDINGS</div>

- *Comprehending* is a dynamic process of meaning making. "*Comprehension* is always the product of two elements: what we knew before we read and what we are able to assimilate or accommodate to enhance and expand on that knowledge" (Goodman, Fries, and Strauss, 2016).

- "The brain actually constructs a mental text—we call it the reader's text—based on the published text. Remember what you are seeing as you read is not meaning but patterns of ink. You as the reader must construct from them a meaningful text and make sense of it. It is this reader's text that the reader comprehends" (Goodman, Fries, and Strauss, 2016).

- The more we read, the more we know—and, therefore, the more expansive our capacity to comprehend (Kintsch, 2004).

- Comprehension is the "ability to understand the meaning of what is said, or read, as well as its intent" (Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014).

- Proficient reading—which entails high-level comprehension—is a complex process, involving an intricate orchestration of multiple skills, strategies, and conceptual understandings also known as *systems of strategic actions* (Fountas and Pinnell, 2017).

- Text comprehension requires the involvement of many different components, relying upon many different kinds of information and yielding complex mental representations … However, text comprehension is not simply the sum of the activity of these various processes, but arises from their *coordinated* operation as a system" (Kintsch and Rawson, 2005).

- Each reader builds a system for processing texts that begins with early reading behaviors and becomes a network of strategic activities for reading increasingly complex texts. Reading is thinking: within the text, about the text, and beyond the text (Fountas and Pinnell, 2017).

More to Know: The Construction-Integration Model of Comprehension

Duke et al. (2011) provides a cogent explanation of Walter Kintsch's widely cited theoretical model of comprehension, Construction-Integration (2004):

> *We bring knowledge to the comprehension process, and that knowledge shapes our comprehension. When we comprehend, we gain new information that changes our knowledge, which is then available for later comprehension. So, in that positive, virtuous cycle, knowledge begets comprehension, which begets knowledge, and so on. In a very real sense, we literally read and learn our way into greater knowledge about the world and greater comprehension capacity.*

Kintsch's own explanation follows this logical line of thinking: When we read, we draw on our knowledge of the world together with our perceptions of what we believe the text is about to construct a mental representation of what we think the text means. Learning is a matter of merging or integrating our mental representations with our stored knowledge. Thus, every time we read, we learn more.

Kintsch suggests there are two aspects of reading that must merge for comprehension to occur: 1) the text base—what the text says; and 2) the situation model—what the text means. The text base (words, sentences, paragraphs) requires an accurate reading of the text for the purpose of getting the key ideas from the text into working memory. The situation model, on the other hand, integrates information from the text base with relevant prior knowledge retrieved from long-term memory, which is then folded into an emerging situation model of meaning of the text. Duke et al. (2011) sum it up:

> *In our classrooms, comprehension begins with learning language in connection with experiences with text—hearing written language read aloud and engaging with and talking about books. In this regard, reading is not just a skill we help our students acquire but an integral part of the way they learn to use their minds—to think deeply within the text, beyond the text, and about the text—and engage in the quality, high-level comprehension that the new, more rigorous standards remind us is necessary if our students are to graduate from high school as proficient readers. What's more, the ability to engage in sustained comprehension and sophisticated thinking and reflection is the hallmark of a successful, literate life (Scharer et al., 2018; Beers and Probst, 2017).*

Expand Knowledge and Enrich the Imagination

Every day, we want our students to stretch themselves intellectually— to explore new concepts, topics, and themes, to try out new ways of thinking about books, to extend their vocabularies and increase their control over language. We also want them to challenge themselves through wide, varied reading, precise, focused writing, and as always, deep

thinking and invigorating conversation. In this way, our students will develop both the conceptual and literary knowledge they need to open wide fiction and informational texts and to read with high-level, quality comprehension. As literacy expert Janet Angelillo reminds us, "Learning to think powerfully about books is one of the great truths students will learn in school."

Closing Thoughts

It's not always easy to understand the complex challenge of reading comprehension, but we can observe what readers do, chart their "miscues" (Goodman, et al., 2014), and draw conclusions about what constitutes effective comprehension (Duke and Pearson, 2002):

- Readers are *active*.

- Readers have clear *goals* in mind for their reading. They constantly evaluate whether the text, and their reading of it, is meeting their goals.

- Readers typically *look* over the text before they read, noting such things as the structure of the text and text sections that might be most relevant to their reading goals.

- Readers frequently *make predictions*, as they read, about what is to come.

- Readers read *selectively*, continually making decisions about their reading—what to read carefully, what to read quickly, what not to read, what to reread, and so forth.

- Readers *construct, revise,* and *question* the meanings they make as they read.

- Readers *think within the text*; they try to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words and concepts in the text and deal with inconsistencies or gaps as needed.

- Readers *think beyond the text*; they draw from, compare, and integrate their prior knowledge with material in the text.

- Readers *think about the text*; they think about the authors of the text, their style, beliefs, intentions, historical milieu, and so forth.

- Readers *monitor their understanding* of the text, making adjustments in their reading as necessary.

- Readers *evaluate the text's quality and value* and react to the text in a range of ways, both intellectually and emotionally.

- Readers read different kinds of texts differently.

- Readers, when reading narrative, attend closely to the setting and characters.

- Readers, when reading informational texts, construct and revise summaries of what they have read.

- Readers understand that text processing occurs not only during reading, but also during short breaks during reading and afterward.

- Readers understand that comprehension is a continuous and complex activity, but it is always *satisfying* and *productive*.

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BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

"When students do not have the knowledge necessary to comprehend a particular text, such knowledge needs to be built; one cannot activate what is not there, and one cannot strategize about things one does not know."

—Dr. Julie Learned, Dr. Darin Stockdill and Dr. Elizabeth Moje, *Integrating Reading Strategies and Knowledge Building in Adolescent Literacy Instruction*

KEY FINDINGS

➤ The most important factor in determining how much readers will comprehend about a given topic is their level of knowledge about the topic (Routman, 2018; Dochy, Segers, and Buehl, 1999).

➤ Prior knowledge of a subject is fundamental to acquiring new knowledge; it is fundamental to comprehending texts (Hampton and Resnick, 2008; Allington and Cunningham, 2007).

➤ Providing students with information relevant to a text or making students aware of already-known, relevant information (also known as "frontloading") improves their comprehension (Routman, 2018).

➤ "Excellent teachers at every grade level and in all content areas use frontloading to optimize learning success for all students … Frontloading begins by consciously building a strong foundation of knowledge, processes, and strategies that will enable the learner to do the inquiry, problem solving, task writing, reading, and so on, with minimal guidance and support" (Routman, 2018).

➤ The more children read, the more they build their background knowledge that strengthens their ability to comprehend. Effective teachers of reading facilitate the expansion of background knowledge by providing frequent and varied opportunities for their students to interact with a variety of trade books (Scharer et al., 2018; Harvey and Ward, 2017).

➤ Fleming (2016) argues that we need more children's literature set in urban settings to mirror the experiences of the vast numbers of children who live in urban communities (one-third of all elementary school children)—so unlike the pastoral settings featured in many children's books. To fully engage and comprehend, children need to see and hear the language and experiences of their own personal lives.

➤ ReLeah Lent (2012) offers a cogent explanation: "A person's background knowledge, often called prior knowledge, is a collection of 'abstracted residue' (Schallert, 2002) that has been formed from all of life's experiences. We all, whether as a toddler or a centenarian, bring diverse bits of background knowledge—consciously or subconsciously—to every subsequent experience, and we use them to connect or glue new information to old. Background knowledge is an essential component in learning because it helps us make sense of new ideas and experiences."

More to Know: Background Information— Essential for Comprehension

Many of us—even as adults—have experienced reading something that we had trouble understanding because we lacked the background knowledge to comprehend it—technical programming manuals, tax documents, or medical results all come to mind. If we're not computer programmers, tax lawyers, or physicians, we may falter in our attempts to fully absorb and understand them. But the failure to comprehend has nothing to do with our intelligence or reading ability—it has everything to do with our lack of background knowledge.

The most important factor in determining how much readers will comprehend writing about a given topic is their level of knowledge about the topic (interest in the topic is also important but is often related to prior knowledge). Up to 81 percent of the variance in post-test scores is explained by prior knowledge (Dochy, Segers, and Buehl, 1999). The importance of prior knowledge to comprehension is part of all modern theories of reading (Allington, 2012; Smith, 2012; Duke et al., 2011; Anderson and Pearson, 1984; Spivey, 1996).

Prior knowledge about a topic creates a schema—a framework or structure—that supports thinking and helps readers process new information about the topic. However, if we've had no experience with or exposure to a particular topic that we encounter in a text, we won't have the schema to help us process and understand the new topic. Because comprehension is dependent on prior knowledge, children without knowledge of a particular topic may not be able to comprehend much of what they read about that topic. Readers who don't possess the knowledge that the writer assumes they have may fill in the blanks with knowledge the author had not intended , or not fill in the blanks at all (Fleming, 2016; Santman, 2005).

How to Build and Activate Background Knowledge

Fortunately, there's an easy and effective solution: provide students with the background knowledge they need comprehend the books they are reading, and help them activate what they do know.

Before students start reading, they benefit immeasurably from a quick overview of the reading journey ahead—easily and efficiently accomplished through quick two- to three-minute teacher book talks, picture walks through a book with illustrations, DVD clips, slide shows, vocabulary introduction and definitions, and interactive discussion. ("What do we already know about this topic?") All of these strategies can play a role in helping students fill knowledge gaps, enabling them to create the schema they need to process and comprehend new information (Duke, et al., 2011). Additionally, if students are facing particularly challenging content, a history textbook for example, reading historical trade books first may help. The easier, engaging reading builds background knowledge that will ease students' way into the more challenging textbook.

The Benefits of the "Think Aloud"

Students may not relate to texts that they encounter in school or believe that these texts belong to them. Students may view school texts, remote from their experience or knowledge, as something they must memorize and then forget. Sadly, this view hinders simple comprehension because successful readers must connect their personal knowledge to every text. A simple way to encourage students to connect their background to text is to model a think aloud. Teachers demonstrate think alouds by reading the text aloud as they normally would, and then pausing now and then to ask themselves questions about the text. When students observe teachers asking questions and demonstrating a reflective demeanor, they begin to realize what it is to read. It is more than words on a page; it is one's interaction with the text that makes reading come to life. Teachers may ask the students to think aloud in pairs, teams, or, as they gain confidence as reflective readers, as individuals. It can be slow, but students see between the lines, insert themselves into the scene, and discover reading. This constant use of background knowledge is a vital enabler of reading comprehension (Scharer et al., 2018; Yudowitch, Henry, and Guthrie, 2008; Wilhelm, 2012).

Closing Thoughts

Helping students acquire the information they need to process a new text often happens most effectively during pre-reading. Providing students with information relevant to a text or making students aware of already known, relevant information improves their comprehension (Shanahan, 2012). As Hampton and Resnick (2008) note, "In the subjects studied in school, prior knowledge of the subject is fundamental for acquiring new knowledge. It is fundamental to comprehending texts."

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VOCABULARY

"How does one learn the language of literature that is so different from everyday spoken language except by reading books?"

—Professor Emerita Lilly Wong Fillmore, University of California at Berkeley

KEY FINDINGS

➤ "On average, 90% of the words in a text are drawn from 2,500 complex word families (e.g., *help, helping, helps, helped, helper*, but not *helpless* or *helpful)*. The other 10% of the words in texts come from the remaining 300,000 (or more) words in the English language" (Hiebert, 2015).

➤ Developing the core vocabulary (i.e., the 2,500 complex word families) through voluminous reading (the best and most effective way to develop vocabulary)—together with instructional strategies that spotlight the core vocabulary—enables students to successfully tackle new and unique words they might encounter in text (Hiebert, 2016, 2019).

➤ The more children read, the more their vocabularies grow (Hiebert, 2019; Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014; Kuhn et. al., 2006; Allington, 2012, 2009; Baumann, 2009). Conversely, reading comprehension is impacted by the depth and breadth of the reader's vocabulary (Wong Fillmore, 2014).

➤ Incidental word learning accounts for a large percentage of all new words learned. Estimates are that each year children learn on average 3,000 words, only about 300 of which are explicitly taught to them in school (Krashen, 2011; Massaro, 2016; Beck and McKeown, 1991).

➤ Still, children benefit from both implicit and explicit instruction. For example, children are more likely to remember new words in a read-aloud when teachers offer a brief definition of the words before or during the read-aloud (Neuman and Taylor, 2013).

➤ Vocabulary, in particular, is very highly correlated with reading comprehension in the upper elementary years (Hiebert, 2019; Duke and Carlisle, 2011; Baumann, 2009; Wagner, Muse and Tannenbaum, 2007). What's more, vocabulary demand is the feature of text complexity that is likely the greatest challenge (Nelson et al., 2012).

KEY FINDINGS

➤ "Gains in oral vocabulary development predict growth in comprehension and later reading performance" (Elleman, Lindo, and Compton, 2009; cited by Neuman and Taylor, 2013).

➤ Teachers can make Tier II words (the more sophisticated words that typically appear in more challenging texts) accessible to their students by building background knowledge in book talks, explaining the words, using them in conversation, and prompting students to use them as well (Beck et al., 2003).

➤ Based on a comparison of effect sizes, Stahl and Fairbanks concluded that the most effective vocabulary teaching methods include both definitional and contextual information in their programs, involved the students in deeper processing, and gave the students more than one or two exposures to the to-be-learned words (Wright, Cervetti, 2017).

➤ The results of the current study provide preliminary evidence that there is potential for knowledge to be built during English Language Arts through a focus on conceptual coherence in the design of reading experiences for students. It also suggests that we should be concerned about ensuring that students have regular opportunities to develop their discipline-specific and general world knowledge (Cervetti, Wright, and Hwang, 2016).

➤ We believe that such research can contribute to models of vocabulary learning and instruction and comprehension that, over time, could increase the robustness and efficacy of curriculum and instruction. Ultimately, digital databases and tools hold promise for addressing the vocabulary gap and providing instructional solutions that could enable many more students to enter workplaces and communities with the literacy levels required for the 21st century (Hiebert, Goodwin, and Cervetti, 2018).

➤ Providing students with even brief explanations of word meanings prior to reading boosted passage comprehension compared to peers who did not receive this instruction (Carney et al., 1984). Likewise, using technology to give students access to glosses (i.e., to provide basic information about word meanings) while reading online boosted comprehension and may be an efficient and practical strategy for supporting students' reading (Türk and Erçetin, 2014).

➤ The use of computers in vocabulary instruction was found to be more effective than some traditional methods in a few studies. It is clearly emerging as a potentially valuable aid to classroom teachers in the area of vocabulary instruction (NRP Report, 2016).

KEY FINDINGS

- ➤ Morphological instruction that was sustained and integrated with other literacy instruction over an extensive period of time may show greater transfer (Bowers, Kirby, and Deacon, 2010).

  - Introducing morphology as an organized system that links words even when pronunciation shifts appear irregular (e.g., heal/health, sign/signal) may motivate struggling students to study words more closely (Bowers, Kirby, and Deacon, 2010).

  - With a foundation of morphological knowledge gained with the support of instruction from the start, it is possible that many students who fail in response to typical instruction could achieve much stronger success (Bowers, Kirby, and Deacon, 2010).

- ➤ Vocabulary is one of the most obvious other areas of literacy instruction to integrate with morphological instruction. Despite the importance of vocabulary instruction cited by National Reading Panel (2000), there is a growing recognition that vocabulary instruction has received insufficient attention in classroom instruction and literacy research (Beck et al., 2002; Biemiller and Boote, 2006).

- ➤ Morphological interventions hold promise, especially for students who face challenges in language learning and literacy, but additional research is needed to provide a basis for informed decisions about the design of effective morphological interventions. And morphological knowledge does indeed contribute to literacy achievement for students in kindergarten through sixth grade (Carlisle, Goodwin, and Nagy (2013).

- ➤ If students are to develop a deep understanding of vocabulary in literary texts, instruction needs to uncover the underlying uses of language in narratives. The Vocabulary Megaclusters provide a framework for teachers, publishers, and curriculum developers to select vocabulary and design instruction around critical concepts within narratives (Elfrieda H. Hiebert TextProject, 2011).

- ➤ Overall, morphological instruction showed a significant improvement in literacy achievement. Specifically, its effect was significant on several literacy outcomes such as phonological awareness, morphological awareness, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and spelling (Goodwin and Ahn, 2010).

More to Know: Students Read Their Way into a Robust Vocabulary

According to the research, the majority of vocabulary growth occurs not as a result of direct instruction, but as the result of reading voluminously (Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014). Effective teachers of reading know that for students to own a word, they need to see it used in meaningful contexts multiple times. By reading voluminously, students are frequently exposed to words in meaningful contexts, thus increasing their opportunities to learn new words. Even a moderate amount of daily independent reading of trade books has a positive impact on vocabulary growth. Students at all levels who read independently acquire thousands of new words as the result of reading more. Cunningham and Zibulsky explain:

> It is estimated that an 18-month-old learns an average of five new words a day in order to develop a receptive vocabulary of around 8,000 words by the time the child is six years old. At the time of high school graduation … the average student knows approximately 40,000 words. In order for a child to increase his vocabulary from 8,000 to 40,000 words in roughly 12 years, he needs to learn approximately 32,000 words between first grade and twelfth grade (i.e., seven words a day, every day of the year for 12 years) … When we consider that the average school program of direct vocabulary instruction covers only a few hundred words and word parts per year, it seems evident that the type of vocabulary development that is necessary for skilled reading is beyond the scope of even the most intensive programs of vocabulary instruction.

Effective teachers of reading know that encouraging their students to read trade books, both in and out of school, is the best way to bolster their vocabulary. As books are rich in academic language, the extended reading of trade books not only increases vocabulary in terms of quantity, but it also enhances vocabulary in terms of quality. "Written language, including the language found in children's books, is far more sophisticated and complex than is spoken language, even that of college educated adults" (Scharer, 2018; Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014; Allington, 2012; Hayes, 1988). Compared to written language, spoken language is "lexically impoverished."

Decontextualized Language

Why is written language so different from conversational language? Shelebine (2001) provides two primary reasons that involve differences in function and degree of contextualization:

- Though a common purpose of conversational language entails "the negotiation of interpersonal relationships," written language more often seeks to communicate novel or cognitively demanding information (Snow, 1991).

- The task of written communication is further complicated because it is decontextualized. Writers do not know their readers, are not speaking to them in person, cannot use contextual cues such as gestures and intonation, and cannot negotiate meaning interactively; therefore, written language in general, and vocabulary, in particular, must be explicit.

The Role of Vocabulary Instruction

Beck found that words are learned best in the context of reading followed by rich discussion in the classroom. One of her most significant contributions is organizing words into three tiers based on their usefulness and frequency of use. Beck and McKeown (2002) suggest that for instructional purposes, teachers should concentrate on Tier II words—also known as academic vocabulary—that:

- Reflect mature language use and appear frequently across a variety of contexts.
- Lend themselves to instruction, helping students build in-depth knowledge of these words and their connections to other words and concepts.
- Provide precision and specificity in describing a concept for which the students already have a general understanding.

Duke and Carlisle (2011) also cite the high correlation (0.86) between academic vocabulary and comprehension, and they offer several strategies that students can use again and again to lock down the meaning of more sophisticated content words, including relating words to themes and to similar words. These word associations help build networks of meaning that support reading comprehension. In addition, Scott, Skobel, and Wells (2008) recommend creating a "word conscious" classroom where language is discussed and relished daily, and students delight in an exploration of words.

Closing Thoughts

Increased vocabulary knowledge helps students understand what they read, and reading comprehension is enhanced when students understand the meaning of words. Thus, there is a reciprocal benefit to independent reading of trade books. One of the best-established relationships in the field of reading is the connection between vocabulary development and achievement in reading (Kuhn, 2006; Hiebert, 2015). Independent reading is the major source of vocabulary acquisition beyond the beginning stages of learning to read (Christ and Wang, 2010). Students who read widely learn the meanings of thousands of new words each year.

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FLUENCY

"Fluent readers raise and lower the volume and pitch of their voices, they speed up and slow down at appropriate places in the text, they read words in meaningful groups or phrases, they pause at appropriate places within the text. These are elements of expression, or prosody—the melody of language."

—Dr. Timothy Rasinski, professor of literacy education, Kent State University

KEY FINDINGS

➤ The research of the past two decades clearly demonstrates a robust correlation between expressive oral reading and silent reading comprehension That is, students who read orally with good expression are more likely to comprehend deeply when reading silently. So we see fluency as a critical bridge between word recognition and comprehension. If students are unable to develop that bridge, they will likely have difficulty in achieving necessary levels of comprehension when reading (Rasinski and Cheesman Smith, 2018).

➤ Successful reading requires readers to process the text (the surface level of reading) and comprehend the text (the deeper meaning). Reading fluency refers to the reader's ability to develop control over surface-level text processing so that he or she can focus on understanding the deeper levels of meaning embedded in the text" (Rasinski, 2004, 2018).

➤ Voluminous, independent reading is the primary source of reading fluency (Allington, 2012).

➤ Unless children read substantial amounts of print, their reading will remain laborious, lacking fluency and limited in effectiveness (Allington, 2012).

➤ Fluency is not a stage of development. For any reader, fluency varies with the complexity of the text, the purpose for reading, the genre, the reader's familiarity with the text, and the like (Fountas and Pinnell, 2006).

➤ "The fluent reader is demonstrating comprehension, taking cues from the text and taking pleasure in finding the right tempo for the text" (Newkirk, 2011).

> ➤ Quick ratings of third-, fifth-, and eighth-grade students' oral reading correlated significantly with their overall reading proficiency on standardized silent-reading comprehension tests (Rasinski, 2010).

> ➤ Fluency develops as a result of many opportunities to practice reading with a high degree of success (Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn, 2001).

More to Know: The Role of Text

Students who relish and read trade books are typically fluent readers. Effective teachers of reading know that fluency develops from an abundance of reading practice with books that readers can read with success. It's a simple formula: Students who read many books at their independent reading level become more fluent at reading and gain competence and confidence as readers.

A well-stocked classroom library (Scholastic recommends at least 1,500 titles) provides students with access to trade books representing a variety of genres, topics, authors, and reading levels—ensuring that each student has the opportunity to experience reading success (McGill-Franzen and Botzakis, 2009). Effective teachers of reading understand that when reading to develop fluency, students need to read books that are neither too hard nor too easy for them. Texts that are too hard may impede comprehension, and texts that are too easy may not promote vocabulary growth. Effective teachers know the interests and reading levels of their students and the reading levels of the trade books in their classroom, so that they can match their students to texts that can be read with success.

Poetry and songs that highlight prosody and the music of language are also "ideal for teaching reading fluency" (Rasinski, 2010). There are numerous instructional strategies, including choral reading, reader's theater, poetry coffeehouses, repeated reading, and book buddies, that foster oral reading and help children develop both the ear and confidence for fluent reading (Rasinski and Cheesman Smith, 2018). As Rasinski (2010) notes, "Choral reading builds fluency as well as a sense of community. The daily reading of a school motto, song, or other communal text unites students under a common sense of purpose."

Closing Thoughts

Effective teachers of reading recognize that fluency varies with the type and readability of the text. These teachers strive to provide their students with a wide range of reading experiences with books representing a variety of genres and writing styles. A large and varied classroom library supports students' interaction with diverse books.

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Did you know?

• • •

Kids who choose their own books rather than read teacher-selected books

read more...

and student-selected reading is

twice as powerful

as teacher-selected reading in developing reading engagement and comprehension.

"
Finding the right book and the right time can light an emotional spark within children that motivates them to read more, understand more, and read joyfully. When that happens, the world opens. Everything becomes possible.

—Richard Robinson, CEO and president of Scholastic

Chapter 3
EQUITY

WHOLE CHILD

"Schools must be concerned with the total development
of children."

—Dr. Nell Noddings, professor emerita, Stanford University

KEY FINDINGS

- ➤ Clearly, we're experiencing a much-needed shift from a single focus on standards and skills to a broader perspective that centers on the whole child and social-emotional well-being, honors cultural and linguistic diversity, and recognizes the need for school connectedness and family and community engagement.

- ➤ The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that states report at least one new measure of student progress, beyond the traditional academic ones—drawing from "social-emotional" or "noncognitive" skills such as persistence, creativity, self-control, kindness, respect, and tolerance—that manifest in multiple ways throughout our lives.

- ➤ Social-emotional traits and abilities are "linked to academic achievement, productivity and collegiality at work, positive health indicators, and civic participation, and are nurtured through life and school experiences. Developing these skills should thus be an explicit goal of public education" (Garcia and Weiss, 2016).

- ➤ Much of the recent social-emotional learning (SEL) interest can be linked to two seminal studies. In 2011, a meta-analysis published in the journal *Child Development* showed an 11-percentile gain in academic achievement for students who participated in a well-implemented SEL program versus students who didn't (Durkak et al., 2011).

- ➤ In 2015, the economist Clive Belfield and colleagues at Teachers College, Columbia University, published a study in the *Journal of Benefit-Cost Analysis* that demonstrated a roughly $11 benefit for every $1 spent on a rigorous SEL program. Just about every way to measure student success shows that SEL can work. At one high school in Texas, discipline referral rates have been cut in half, and graduation rates are at an all-time high.

KEY FINDINGS

- A 2015 national study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* found statistically significant associations between SEL skills in kindergarten and key outcomes for young adults years later in education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health (Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley, 2015).

- When one looks at the research literature across the different fields of inquiry, three characteristics stand out as helping young people feel connected to school while simultaneously encouraging student achievement: (1) high academic standards coupled with strong teacher support; (2) an environment in which adult and student relationships are positive and respectful; and (3) a physically and emotionally safe school environment (Miller and Sharp, 2018; Mapp et al., 2017; Routman, 2018; Klem and Connell, 2004).

- Students who experience school connectedness like school, feel that they belong, believe that teachers care about them and their learning, believe that education matters, have friends at school, believe that discipline is fair, and have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities (Mapp et al., 2017; Klen and Connell, 2004).

- Most experts agree that children "need balance in their school day, and the notion of teaching for the test and trying to cram full the day with only academic work is limited." It seems reasonable to embrace mindfulness and SEL simply for the benefit of "taking time out of a busy school day, and just remembering to breathe" (Resnick, 2017).

- Five cognitive strategy and skill areas—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—were recommended by the NRP to be the focus of reading instruction because they "currently reflect the central issues in reading instruction and reading achievement." A key conclusion of the NRP report was that strategies and skills should be the focus of reading instruction and reading assessment (Afflerbach, 2016).

More to Know: We Can Help Our Students Develop Academic Perseverance

Carol Dweck, a Stanford University psychologist, writing in her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2007), introduces her readers to two mental constructs: fixed mindset and growth mindset. As the labels suggest, people with a fixed mindset believe they come into the world with a fixed amount of intellectual firepower. They accept failure as an inevitable reflection of their cognitive limitations. People with a growth mindset, on the other hand, refuse to be limited by real or imagined deficiencies of any sort. They believe that with enough hard work, perseverance, and practice, success is inevitable.

Ryan and Deci (2006) suggest that we are mostly motivated not by the material consequences of our actions but by the inherent enjoyment and meaning that those actions bring us, a phenomenon known as *intrinsic motivation*. They identified three key human needs: 1) our need for competence; 2) our need for autonomy; and 3) our need for relatedness (personal connection). A growth mindset and intrinsic motivation develop when these three essential needs are sustained.

In a similar way, educators Pam Allyn and Ernest Morrell (2016) speak of the "seven strengths" which include belonging, curiosity, friendship, kindness, confidence, courage, and hope. In combination, the seven strengths help to build "super readers" who develop strong identities as readers together with the mindset to control and monitor their own reading destinies.

Closing Thoughts

Garcia and Weiss (2016) explain the policy implications of acknowledging the social-emotional skills that enable our students to lead more fulfilling and productive lives. What does this mean for the ways in which we go about designing high-quality education for our students? Garcia and Weiss explain that we need to:

Better Define and Measure These Skills
"Integrating social-emotional skills into the education policy agenda requires, first, the identification of a satisfactory and concrete list of these skills, and systems or scales to measure them. Measurement and methodological research are required to validate a complete and accurate list of education-related noncognitive skills, and to provide metrics that are both reliable and usable."

Broaden the Curriculum
"The identification of those noncognitive skills that play important roles in education should prompt a discussion of how to design broader curricula and specific instructional strategies to promote those skills, including promoting school and classroom environments conducive to them."

Enhance Teacher Preparation, Training, and Support

"Fully integrating noncognitive skills into the curriculum also requires that teachers' preparation and professional support are geared toward the development of these skills in their students, as well as an emphasis on the importance of relationships."

Revisit School Disciplinary Policies

"Many current disciplinary measures used to combat student misbehavior are at odds with the goal of nurturing noncognitive skills. Disciplinary measures should be rooted in schools' efforts to support and promote better behavior, and in the prevention of misbehavior, rather than simply or mainly in punishing wrongdoing."

Broaden Assessment and Accountability

"Accountability practices and policies must be broadened to make explicit the expectation that schools and teachers contribute to the development of noncognitive skills and to make the development of the whole child central to the mission of education policy."

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SOCIAL JUSTICE

"Educators play a vital role in teaching about social injustice and discrimination in all its forms with regard to differences in race, ethnicity, culture, gender, gender expression, age, appearance, ability, national origin, language, spiritual belief, sexual orientation, socioeconomic circumstance, and environment."

—NCTE policy statement, 2010

KEY FINDINGS

- "More than 16 million children in the United States—22% of all children—live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level—$23,550 a year for a family of four. Research shows that, on average, families need an income of about twice that level to cover basic expenses. Using this standard, 45% of children live in low-income families" (Jiang et al., 2016).

- Across the country, more than seven million students are missing enough days of school to be academically at risk. Chronic absence—missing 10 percent or more of school days due to absence for any reason, whether for excused, unexcused or absences and suspensions—can translate into third-graders unable to master reading, sixth-graders failing subjects, and ninth-graders dropping out of high school (Chang and Leong, 2018).

- As Stephen Krashen's research (2011) has demonstrated time and again, access to books is as strong a factor in school success as poverty is a detriment. In other words, if children have access to books in their schools (Miller and Sharp, 2018; Krashen, Lee, and McQuillan, 2010) and in their homes (Schubert and Becker, 2010; Evans, Kelley, Sikora, and Treieman, 2010), they can read their way out of the ravages of poverty (Sweeney, 2014).

- If all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, which would be equivalent to a 12 percent cut in world poverty (Sweeney, 2014).

KEY FINDINGS

- The National Board of School Psychologists, dedicated to helping students thrive, defines social justice as "both a process and a goal that requires action." The aim is "to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting non-discriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities … to enact social justice through culturally-responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth" (NASP, 2017).

- Psychologist Walter Gilliam (2014) warns of an "implicit bias" against children of color. Specifically, "black children represent 18% of preschool enrollment, but 48% of children receiving more than one out-of-school suspension. Similarly, boys represent 54% of the preschool enrollment, but 79% of children suspended once and 82% of children suspended multiple times.

- "The primary goal of early care and education is to promote overall school readiness, especially for those needing the most assistance. Clearly, expelling or suspending preschoolers counters the overall objective of early education programs—to promote school readiness in order to improve later educational success" (Gilliam, 2014).

- Decades of research prove a simple truth: more often than not, strong families yield strong, successful students. All families have dreams for their children and want the very best for them, but without open communication and collaboration, how to best help families support their children isn't always easy or clear. To this end, a strong school-family partnership can make all the difference as (Bryk et al., 2009) demonstrated in their study of Chicago schools. They found that student performance is not only influenced by the home, school, and community environments in which children live, but also by the relationships among these settings. When home, school, and community forces come together to lend students both academic and personal support, student motivation and participation increases.

- We certainly don't want any students attempting the grand performance that is the summative assessment without continued checks that they are developing the collection of needed strategies and skills to the point that they can succeed (Afflerbach, 2016).

More to Know: Resilience and the Terrible Challenge of Poverty

Our public schools are facing a terrible challenge. According to the National Center for Education Statistics and reported by the Southern Education Foundation (Suitts, 2015), the majority of this country's public school children (51%) are now from households rocked by poverty—and poverty creates stress. Hence the ever-deepening interest in childhood resilience. "Children who develop effective coping mechanisms for responding to stress and positively adapt in the face of adversity are said to be resilient—an important concept in child development and mental health theory and research." Dr. Steve Southwick, professor of psychiatry, and Dr. Linda Mayes, Arnold Gesell professor in the Child Study Center, both of Yale Medical School and leading authorities on resilience, remind us that "helping children develop resilience-boosting skills is critical—especially when families are confronted with economic, social, and health issues." To that end, one of the most reliable predictors of resilience is the strong network of social support that children create and maintain when they possess the social competence to do so.

One way to help children develop the skills they need to navigate relationships at home and beyond is through literacy-based practices and materials. The bedtime story is a time-honored way to strengthen and enhance a loving relationship between a young child and parent or caregiver. It's easy to see how engagement with books and other print or digital literary resources might work to help children build the social skills they need to successfully navigate our dynamic and fast-changing social world. "As scientists learn more about the complex interplay of genetics, development, cognition, environment, and neurobiology," it will be possible to develop an array of interventions, including those that are literacy-based, to enhance resilience to stress (Tominey et al., 2011).

In general, family engagement plays a pivotal role in supporting all children. Dr. Karen Mapp 2017), the leading proponent of family and community engagement, writes, "When parents are engaged and involved, their children succeed." Specifically:

- Their grades go up.
- They attend school more regularly.
- They are more likely to enroll in higher-level programs.
- They are more likely to graduate and go on to attend college.
- They are more excited and positive about school and learning.
- They have fewer discipline issues inside and outside of class.

Learning Supports: Bringing School, Family, and Community Together

Schools and districts, of course, can build in structures that provide an integrated, sustained pathway of learning supports that foster resilience and enables all students to succeed and thrive. UCLA psychologists Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor's research (2008), developed over the course of 30 years in the field, places student learning and well-being at the center and draws in every component of support—social-emotional, physical, and academic—to create an integrated continuum of coordinated support. The aim is to move away from the fragmented approaches that have marginalized learning supports for students, leading to poor cost effectiveness (up to 25% of school budgets used in limited and redundant ways) and counterproductive competition for sparse resources—to one that marshals the full strength and force of the school, family, and community.

Closing Thoughts

Not all students come to school ready and able to learn every day. Many students face barriers including poverty that interfere with their ability to be physically or mentally present, and these barriers prevent them from benefiting from quality instruction. To help all students succeed, districts must transform fragmented services into a fully integrated continuum of supports (Chang and Leong, 2018; Howard and Adelman, 2008) and promote independent reading and robust classroom libraries. There is a growing recognition that partnership between families and school staff is not only required to achieve educational excellence for all children, but also to improve our schools. Many states across the U.S. are adopting new standards for assessing teacher and school leader performance, and many of those standards include an expectation of proficient practice in family and community engagement (Mapp, Carver, and Lander, 2017).

For all of us in the work of supporting our children, the goal is clear: we aim to better meet our children's needs by strengthening the connections among schools, families, and communities. Students benefit academically, emotionally, and physically when all the adults in their lives come together and form a continuous, coordinated, and collaborative circle of care around them. The research of Adelman and Taylor, Mayes, Gilliam, and Mapp, together with the work of educators, policy-makers, families, and community partners represented in this research compendium, show us how we might accomplish this worthy and vitally important goal.

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ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION

"Reading engagement is more important than students' family background consisting of parents' education and income. Reading engagement connects to achievement more strongly than to home environment."

—Dr. John Guthrie, National Reading Research Center at the University of Maryland,

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Motivation and reading comprehension go hand in hand; avid readers read extensively with deep comprehension (Duke, et al., 2011).

➤ Motivation works in a spiral: avid readers read more, and their reading prompts increased learning and a passion for even more reading. The reverse is also true (Guthrie et al., 2012).

➤ "A motivated reader is one who engages in significantly more reading than one who is not motivated to do so. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) identified a 300% difference in time spent reading between intrinsically motivated and unmotivated fourth- and fifth-grade readers" (Fisher, Frye, and Lapp, 2012).

➤ Intrinsic motivation drives student reading and reading achievement; students who read only for external reasons—prompted by grades, rewards, or recognition—do not read as often or as deeply (Guthrie, et al., 2012).

➤ A meta-analysis of 128 studies on the effects of rewards concludes that, "tangible rewards tend to have a substantially negative effect on intrinsic motivation. Even when tangible rewards are offered as indicators of good performance, they typically decrease intrinsic motivation for interesting activities" (Deci, Koestner, and Ryan, 1999; cited in Miller and Sharp, 2018).

➤ Readers motivated for personal reasons are more likely to remain interested in reading than readers who are externally motivated through rewards (Marinak and Gambrell, 2008). If we strive to encourage lifelong reading habits, rewarding and incentivizing reading is detrimental (Miller and Sharp, 2018).

➤ Inviting students to choose their own books or suggesting books that they can read and want to read has a profound positive effect on both motivation and comprehension (Miller and Sharp, 2018; Gallagher and Kittle, 2018; Beers and Probst, 2017; Harvey and Ward, 2017; Allington, 2012; Wilhelm and Smith, 2013).

➤ Engagement, motivation, and a growth mindset work in concert (Conley, 2014).

➤ Our assessments must be sensitive to these developments and provide information that describes the status of self-efficacy, the nature of a student's motivation, and the types of attribution that a student makes for reading success or failure. With such assessment information, we can create reading environments and instruction that foster healthy development of students' cognition and affect (Afflerbach, 2016).

More to Know: Engagement Drives Reading Achievement

When it comes to reading achievement, engagement trumps all—it's even more important than family background. In other words, it doesn't matter what education or income a student's parents may have—if students are drawn to read by deep longing and interest, they will succeed (Guthrie, 2008). Think of the inspiring stories of young people who read their way out of poverty and all sorts of life challenges (Westover, 2018; Walls, 2006; Murray, 2010).

The research is equally powerful and convincing. Many studies show that intrinsic motivation drives student reading. Students who read for internal reasons (interest, pleasure, favorite topics) read a lot and do well on all measures of achievement. In contrast, students who read only for external reasons—prompted by grades, rewards, or recognition—do not read as often or as deeply (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1992; Guthrie, et al., 2013).

As Miller and Sharp (2018) note, "Short-term reading excitement for an award or prize does not spark long-term reading engagement. Indeed, reading contests can harm students' reading self-efficacy and interest … When we communicate to children that the only reason to read is to earn a reward or grade, we fail to impart reading's true value. Reading is its own reward and bestows immeasurable gifts on readers."

Gallagher and Kittle (2018) maintain that choice drives engagement—and engagement drives reading and volume. Not only do motivated readers engage in significantly more reading than those who are extrinsically motivated, their level of engagement and comprehension tends to be deeper and richer (Fisher, Frey, and Lapp, 2012; Duke and Carlisle, 2011).

What's more, reading engagement and reading achievement interact in a spiral. Higher achievers read more, and the more engaged these students become, the higher they achieve. Engaged readers want to learn, and they are confident in their abilities. They

persist in the face of difficulty and keep at it until they have achieved their goals (Guthrie, 2012; Dwek, 2008). Likewise, lower achievers read less, and the less engaged decline in achievement. The spiral goes downward as well as upward. In fact, continued low engagement in reading is often a precursor to dropping out of school (Guthrie, 2008).

In general, helping *all* students succeed is not a mystery; we know the teaching elements that motivate and inspire (Muir, 2014):

- Building positive relationships and an inviting school climate

- Providing specific feedback that helps students succeed

- Inviting student hands-on, active work

- Honoring different learning styles

- Developing projects that stem from students' interests

- Avoiding bribes and rewards

- Honoring student voice and choice

- Connecting learning to problem solving and inventive thinking

- Fostering real-world connections

Do Rewards Work?

Paul Tough (2016) tells the story of Roland Fryer, a Harvard economics professor who has given out an astonishing sum of cash trying to encourage parents and their children to care about school and their schoolwork. Alas, all that money has made nearly zero difference and in one case, it even seems to have interfered. Tough explains:

> *From 2007 to 2009, Fryer distributed a total of $9.4 million in cash incentives to 27,000 students, to promote book reading in Dallas, to raise test scores in New York, and to improve course grades in Chicago—all with no effect. "The impact of financial incentives on student achievement," Fryer reported, "is statistically 0 in each city." In the 2010–11 school year, he gave cash incentives to fifth-grade students in 25 low-performing public schools in Houston, and to their parents and teachers, with the intent of increasing the time they spent on math homework and improving their scores on standardized math tests. The students performed the tasks necessary to get paid, but their average math scores at the end of eight months hadn't changed at all. When Fryer looked at their reading scores, he found that they actually went down.*

Closing Thoughts

Teachers who foster reading engagement through classroom instruction and high-interest reading materials not only increase the amount of time that students spend reading silently, but also their overall reading achievement. At the same time, the research shows that teachers who do not focus on student engagement are actually hindering their students by increasing avoidance behaviors. When students avoid reading, they short-circuit the very process that would help them become better readers. Nurturing young readers is not simply a matter of providing instruction that fosters reading engagement—it requires providing instruction that thwarts avoidance behaviors in the classroom (Guthrie and Humenick, 2004).

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THE POWER OF READING CHOICE, TIME, AND PLEASURE

"I was lucky enough to grow up when ... the most wonderful thing a teacher might say was, 'Go to the library and pick out a book.'"

—Dr. Bill McBride, educator, author, and speaker

KEY FINDINGS

➤ "Self-selected independent reading involves a set of strategies that are learned. Development of these strategies should be one of the primary goals of a reading/language arts program. However, the skills of self-selected reading do not develop by simply offering students the books of a library and asking them to pick books. … Typically, students who read avidly—especially young students—have been taught how to select books that interest them" (Hiebert, 2014).

➤ According to a 2007 National Endowment for the Arts study:

  • Nearly half of all 18- to 24-year-olds read no books for pleasure.

  • Fewer than one-third of 13-year-olds read daily.

  • Teens and young adults spend 60 percent less time on voluntary reading than the average.

➤ "For virtually all children, the amount of time spent reading in classrooms consistently accelerates their growth in reading skills" (Anderson, Wilson and Fielding, 1988).

➤ Barry Gilmore (2011) acknowledges that there are many competing interests for students' time these days—television, the internet, social media, and so forth. But he also maintains that educators "play an enormous role in developing attitudes toward reading." He suggests that we've unintentionally hurt our secondary students by: 1) adhering to the canon of Western literature; and 2) failing to spark our students' interest through choice.

➤ *The Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report, Fifth Edition,* confirms what we've long known: independent reading, both at school and at home, builds successful readers. What's more, the research shows that giving our students a say in what they read is key.

➤ The report adds to the abundant data we've had for years that demonstrates that in-school independent reading built around time to read books for fun creates kids who love to read. Seventy-eight percent of children ages 12-17 who are frequent readers, defined by the report as kids who read books for fun five to seven times a week, reported that they have the opportunity to read a book of choice independently during the school day. Only 24% of infrequent readers—those reading for fun less than one day a week—say the same. In addition, 91% of children ages 6-17 agree that "my favorite books are the ones that I have picked out myself." We might deduce that independent reading programs that invite reading choice and promote reading pleasure give rise to kids who not only read, but more importantly, want to read.

More to Know: Pleasure Is Essential

Jeff Wilhelm and Michael Smith (2013) investigated the pleasure that avid adolescent readers take from their out-of-school reading in their book, *Reading Unbound: Why Kids Need to Read What They Want—and Why We Should Let Them*. They demonstrate that pleasure is not incidental to reading—it's essential. They found that the young people with whom they worked spoke of their reading pleasure with remarkable sophistication—and their pleasure supported the intense and high-level engagement with texts that schools seek to foster. The authors write:

> In our study of the out-of-school reading lives of 14 eighth-graders who were avid readers of texts often marginalized in schools (romances, vampire stories, horror stories, dystopian novels, and fantasy), we strove to understand the nature and variety of reading pleasure. We found that our participants were remarkably articulate about why they read what they read.
>
> Our data also convinced us of the importance of choice. Students should have regular opportunities to behave the way adult readers do and choose their own reading. They know the kinds of texts from which they will take pleasure. At the same time, teachers should expand the possibility of pleasure by introducing students to new books they might not select on their own. If we want students to embrace reading now and always, then we need to keep at the forefront of our attention the rich, complex, and profound pleasures of reading.

Wilhelm and Smith also found that the reading pleasure their students experienced was multi-faceted and led them to read for a number of reasons—at times, for sheer fun and enjoyment, but also for the profound intellectual, social-emotional, and psychological benefits they received from reading. For this reason, Wilhelm and Smith maintain that students must be free to choose at least some of their own reading in school.

Report from a Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) Program

Jeff McQuillan (2001) reports similar breakthroughs with pleasure reading in SSR (silent sustained reading) at a diverse high school in Anaheim, CA. Most of the students were Latino, and many came from economically deprived homes with limited access to books in their homes or communities:

> Fundamental to any SSR program is, of course, a set amount of time each day for students to read to themselves. Pilgreen and Gribbons (1998) point out that successful SSR programs must be carried out on a regular and frequent basis and not as an occasional activity or tacked on as "filler" on Friday. The teachers started off slowly, allotting 10 minutes a day during the first few weeks of the semester. Most students weren't accustomed to having time for pleasure reading in class, and some needed to work into the habit gradually. No other reading materials (e.g.,

textbooks) were allowed, and students were not permitted to work on homework or class assignments. Within four to six weeks, the time spent reading was gradually increased to 15 and then 20 minutes. Several teachers noted that many students can sit, do nothing, and avoid reading for 10 minutes, but when the SSR is 20 minutes, it is almost impossible for students to do nothing. At that point, they start reading. In some classes, students would read for 30 minutes, complaining if they were given less time! Teachers report that 90 to 95 percent of their students were, in fact, reading their books, consistent with other reports that have found that, when properly implemented, almost all students take advantage of the SSR time provided.

Not only did these formerly disengaged students who disliked reading become "thoroughly enthralled" with their reading, but they also made progress as readers and writers, showing increased achievement scores in vocabulary development and writing proficiency. In multiple ways, more reading led to better reading.

The Thrill of Personal Choice

Students are thrilled when they get to choose their own books. Research has frequently found that self-selection is the hook that snags both children and teens and convinces them to read:

- Allowing students to self-select their books results in more involvement and thus more motivation to read (Sewell, 2003; Gallager, 2009; Pruzinsky, 2014).

- Self-selection allows students more latitude to be deeply involved with the learning process, thus fostering an interest in, as well as developing an ownership of the reading process (Kragler, 2000).

- Students choose books that match their personal interests—both narrative and expository texts. Kids are also drawn to books that their friends or other trusted readers recommend (Edmunds and Bauserman, 2006).

Hiebert (2014) cautions, however, that children benefit from help—they grow into self-selection with parent or teacher guidance and thoughtful scaffolding.

The Value of Time

Students need extensive time to read. Allington and Johnston studied exemplary first- and fourth-grade teachers in six states and found that extensive reading is critical to the development of reading proficiency. "Extensive practice provides the opportunity for students to consolidate the skills and strategies teachers often work so hard to develop. The exemplary elementary teachers we studied recognized this critical aspect of instructional planning. Their students did more guided reading, more independent reading, more social studies and science reading than students in less-effective classrooms" (Allington, 2002).

Closing Thoughts

Global Teacher award-winning Nancie Atwell (2015) also considers reader's choice, time, and pleasure essential. In her classroom and school (Center for Teaching and Learning), choice is a given: "Kids choose what they read because children who choose books are more likely to grow up to become adults who read books. Students who read only a steady diet of assigned titles don't get to answer, for themselves, the single most important question about book reading: why does anyone want to? (2007). She writes:

> *Every day, smart, well-meaning teachers erect instructional roadblocks between their students and the pure pleasure of the personal art of reading. There it is: the P word. I know, because I've felt it, too, that there's a sense of uneasiness among teachers and parents about an approach like a reading workshop. Shouldn't there be some pedagogic strings attached here? Some paper and pencil and small-group activities that look like schoolwork? Because otherwise, isn't reading class, well, too enjoyable?*
>
> *We need to get over it. When we teachers embrace our role as literate grown-ups who help children seek and find delight and enlargement of life in books, they have a good chance of growing into adults who enjoy and love reading.*

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NEW LITERACIES: FAN-CREATED LITERARY CONTENT

"In many ways, the online affinity space related to *The Hunger Games* trilogy is pioneering a new paradigm for young adult literature in a digital age."

—Jen Scott Curwood, digital literacy researcher

KEY FINDINGS

➤ *Affinity spaces,* defined as physical, virtual, or blended spaces where people interact around a common interest or activity, offer new ways for adolescent readers to engage with young adult literature (Curwood, 2013).

➤ "Young men who struggle with reading in school and read below grade level when assessed on academic tests actually read above grade level when assessed on high-interest, video-game related texts." The authors found that readers might vary as much as seven reading levels from one text to the next depending on the kind of text they were reading and whether they were motivated to read it (Steinkuehler, Compton-Lilly, and King, 2010).

➤ Technology can facilitate young people's active participation in online spaces and promote the development of sophisticated literacy skills (Curwood, 2013).

➤ "Research suggests that when young adults read for enjoyment, it positively influences their performance on standardized tests, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)."

➤ "A crucial difference between students who perform well on the PISA and those who perform poorly lies in whether they read daily for enjoyment, rather than in how much time they spend reading. On average, students who read daily for pleasure score the equivalent of 1.5 years of schooling better than those who do not" (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011).

➤ "Research by the Pew Internet and American Life Project indicates that 80% of adolescents use online social network sites, 38% share original creative work online, and 21% remix their own transformative works, inspired by others' words and images" (Curwood et al., 2013).

More to Know: The Wondrous World of New Literacies

In 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts published "Reading At Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America," which issued a double warning: adolescents are 1) becoming disengaged from real books and literature; and 2) functioning as little more than "passive participants" as they read digital books. More than a decade later, it's clear that just the opposite is true. Indeed, as Jen Scott Curwood, one of the leading researchers of digital literacy writes, "Digital literacy practices are more participatory, collaborative, and distributed than conventional print-based literacy."

Curwood (2013) explains that youth "use technology as part of critical inquiry to express and define themselves as they build relationships with their peers through online social networks. Adolescents are engaging in remarkably sophisticated analysis and discussion about their favorite books as they write, create art, produce video, and design role-playing games that often surpass what's expected of them in the classroom. They are drawn, in particular, to dystopian novels such as Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy and fantasy literature such as J. K. Rowlings's *Harry Potter* (Wilhelm and Smith, 2013). Curwood suggests that not only are fans using this literature to inspire and shape their own multi-modal creative expressions, they are "critically engaging" with the text in affinity spaces— in this case primarily virtual spaces where adolescent fans gather to share their knowledge of and enthusiasm for these books.

Those who gather in affinity spaces around books explore a wide range of "new literacies"—blogging, remixing (drawing together content from diverse sources to create something brand new), cultural artifacts, curating and sharing photos, gaming, networking online, editing wikis, creating music videos, and building apps. In the process, we can see the natural fluidity and flexibility of learning when it's not limited by conventional structures and expectations. Students are fully engaged and work together to shape their own experience. Learning flows from one medium to another ,and each student contributes what he or she does best. Not all students must know the same thing at exactly the same time as is so often the expectation in traditional school settings (Gee and Hayes, 2013).

What's more, students are creating work for real audiences—not just the teacher or the "hypothetical, generic audiences" of school. As a result, students make precise and sophisticated calculations about their linguistic and design choices—choosing those features that will most appeal to their very real peer audiences (Curwood, 2013).

Since they are creating content for their peers, students also engage in "ongoing cycles of feedback"—mentoring, advising, and supporting each other. Knobel and Lankshear (2014) suggest that schools typically "privilege teacher feedback over peer feedback on work in progress." Hence, assessment "tends to be summative and focus on technical details with little in-process" guidance.

Perhaps one of the most significant distinguishing features of the new literacies is the emphasis on "doing, making, and sharing" (Alverman, 2010). While schools emphasize the consumption of knowledge and "practicing teacher-taught strategies, often driven by packaged curriculum and textbooks," inside affinity spaces students are creating the strategies they need to get things done and achieve their goals. This, of course, reflects our own lives outside of school where our learning is primarily driven by functional needs and interests.

A Note About Metaliteracy and Transliteracy

One needs only tos venture into an airport or subway station to understand that the world of literacy is transforming before our eyes. Yes, we can spot passengers buried in books, magazines, and newspapers—but many will be accessing them via a range of digital devices. The emergence of social media and online collaborative communities is driving the evolution of "metaliteracy" and "transliteracy" characterized by transience, fluidity, and creative collaboration, as well as "the ability to read, write, and interact across a range of platforms, tools, and media" (Thomas et al., 2007). In other words, "information is not a static object that is simply accessed and retrieved. It is a dynamic entity that is produced and shared collaboratively with innovative Web 2.0 technologies." (Mackey and Jacobson, 2011).

Nowhere has this been more evident than in the multidimensional online community that thrives around the 39 Clues phenomenon. As Mike Bentz, a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher from Solana Beach, CA, writes, "The 39 Clues unlocked an entire world of reading and research for my students. They started a wiki and blog dedicated to the series where they shared predictions and theories, compiled facts they researched about different related topics, and built an online community of learners centered around researching many different aspects of the books." As Bentz notes, his students were so engaged that he was afraid they were not getting enough sleep. He writes, "I often had to tell them to stop blogging so frequently—they were researching late into the night during the week, all on their own!"

Closing Thoughts

The online adolescent fan culture found in affinity spaces is passionate about reading for pleasure, so much so that they are willing to spend hours of their own time outside of school analyzing the books they love—often dystopian, horror, or fantasy titles— as well as creating their own novel responses to those titles that most captivate them. (Wilhelm and Smith, 2013, 2016; Curwood, 2013). What might this mean for teaching? Knobel and Lankshear (2014) suggest three takeaways for teachers:

- Explore firsthand how your students create and remix content using various multimodal mediums. Most importantly, perhaps, understand their collaborative learning process and the continual learning-mentoring-assessment loop that they use to help each other shape and refine their fan-created literary content.

- Understand the fluid, problem-solving, multidimensional nature of the new literacies. Use the language of the new literacies in the classroom to give all students a shot at acquiring it.

- Draw upon the assessment prevalent in new literacy spaces—the continual cycles of feedback always in the service of learning. It's this assessment, available at the moment of need, that fosters deep learning.

As Curwood (2013) writes, "For teachers, young adult literature such as *The Hunger Games* trilogy offers a powerful way to capitalize on their students' interest, integrate technology into the curriculum, and promote critical engagement with literature."

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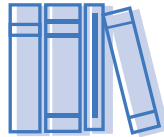
Did you know?

• • •

Students from **high-income communities** have access to

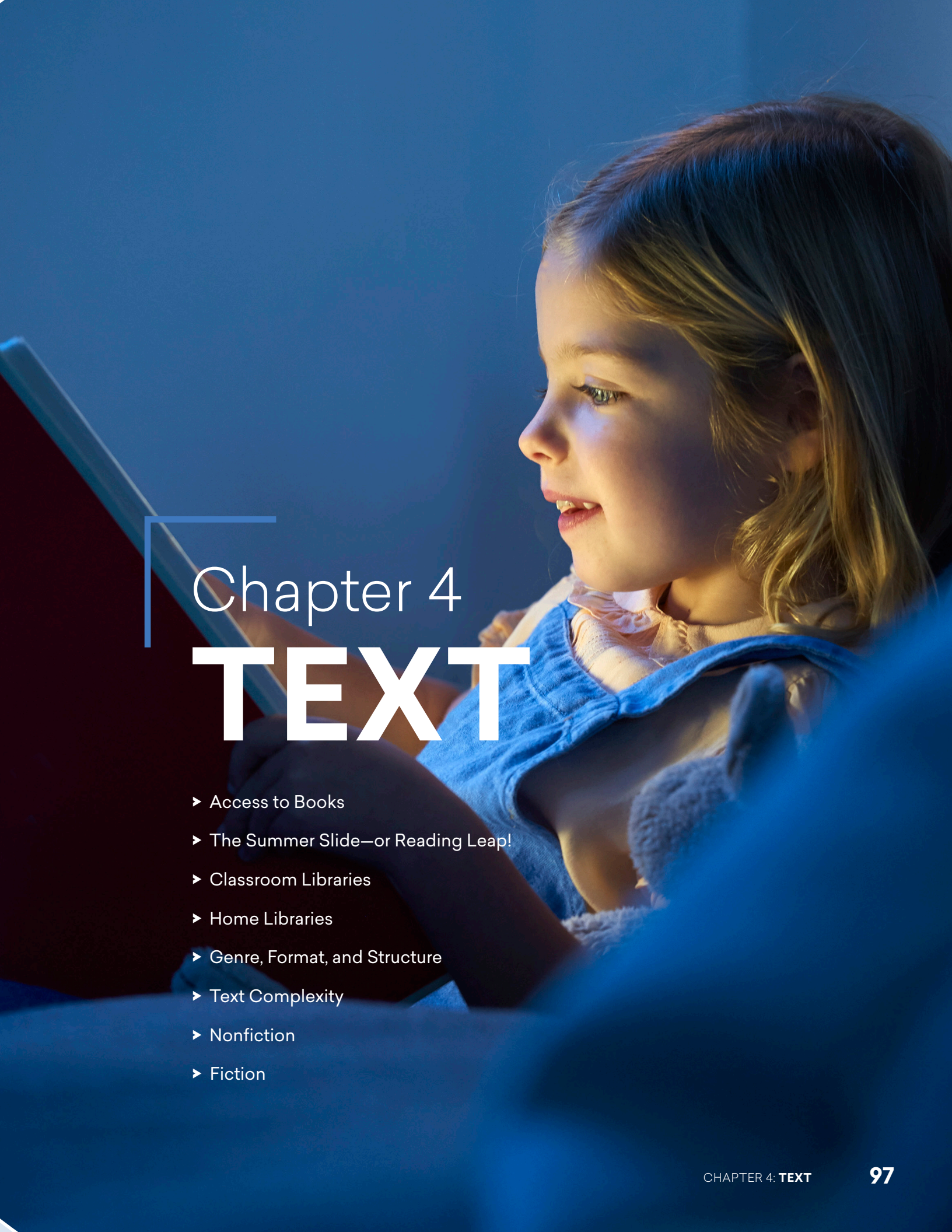**4000 times**

as many books as

students from **low-income communities**.

"

Our celebration of reading must involve the ongoing mission to give all children the opportunity to read and to become lifelong readers.

—Dr. Nell K. Duke, University of Michigan

Chapter 4
TEXT

ACCESS TO BOOKS

"We believe that literacy—the ability to read, write, and understand—is the birthright of every child in the world as well as the pathway to succeed in school and to realize a complete life."

—Richard Robinson, Scholastic chairman, president, and CEO

KEY FINDINGS

- ➤ Placing books in the hands of children fundamentally influences their chances for both personal and academic success (Constantino, 2014; Neuman and Celano, 2012; McGill-Franzen, 2016; Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2013; Kim, 2009).

- ➤ The most successful way to improve the reading achievement of low-income children is to increase their access to print (Neuman and Celano, 2012).

- ➤ Although low-income children have, on average, four children's books in their homes, a team of researchers concluded that nearly two-thirds—or 61 percent of the low-income families they studied—owned no books for their children (US Department of Education, 1996).

- ➤ Unfortunately, little has changed. These contrasting ecologies of affluence and poverty have become the source of increasing racial prejudice, growing class stratification, and widely different opportunities to become well educated.

- ➤ Access to books is fundamental to a hopeful, productive life: being read to, reading for yourself, and discussing what you've read creates an upward, positive spiral that leads to more reading and greater academic achievement and personal fulfillment years down the line (Cunningham and Zilbulsky, 2014; Jacobs, 2014; Neuman and Celano, 2012).

- ➤ Books in the home are a "marker" for a "scholarly culture" that reflects a penchant for reading and learning (Evans, Kelley, Sikora, and Treiman, 2010).

More to Know: "The More the More, the Less the Less"

Susan Neuman and Donna Celano's (2001) seminal study of four Philadelphia neighborhoods—two middle-class and two low-income—reveals the stark reality of lack of access of books for children in low-income homes and communities. The ratio of books to children in middle-income neighborhoods was 13 books to one child, while in low-income neighborhoods the ratio was one book to 300 children (2001, 2006). Alarmingly, more than a decade later, little has changed; indeed, technology—once hoped to bridge the gap—has made the disparity even worse (Neuman and Celano, 2012).

Middle-class parents typically have access to computers in their homes and can navigate technology in ways that benefit their children's developing literacy; on the other hand, poor families without access to computers in the home are less likely to know how to use the technology available in public libraries to help their children access print and learn to read. This becomes yet another way in which children with less continue in a downward literacy spiral, while the children with the benefits of a higher income spiral up.

In their 10 year study of access to books, Neuman and Celeno (2012) saw a pattern they called "the more the more, the less the less." In other words, students who had abundant access to books and "were able to read fluently, reading more and acquiring more information," while students without easy access to books "seemed to develop avoidance strategies, merely tolerating reading without the cognitive involvement associated with reading for comprehension." Given the learning power of reading—what it does to develop the mind—this has devastating consequences:

> *Reading has cognitive consequences that extend beyond the immediate task of understanding particular texts. Studies have shown that avid readers—regardless of general ability—tend to know more than those who read little. Further, those who know more are likely to learn more, and to do so faster; in other words, knowledge begets more knowledge.*

> *This is a stunning finding because it means that children who get off to a fast start in reading are more likely to read more over the years—and this very act of reading develops vocabulary, general knowledge, and information capital. Consequently, children's earliest experiences with print will establish a trajectory of learning that is reciprocal and exponential in nature—spiraling either upward or downward, carrying profound implications for the development of information capital.*

Jonathan Kozol (2005) has called the educational divide between those who have and those who don't "the shame of the nation." Although solving the complex barriers of poverty is largely beyond our means as educators and parents, we can do much to solve the book gap—and therefore, the achievement gap—by making sure that all children have access to books.

In 2010, Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), the largest children's literacy nonprofit in the United States, commissioned a research survey—Children's Access to Print Materials and Education-Related Outcomes—an unprecedented search uncovering 11,000 reports and analyzing 108 of the most relevant studies. The finding were indisputable: children's book distribution and ownership programs have positive behavioral, educational, and psychological outcomes. Providing children access to print accomplishes the following:

- **Improves reading performance.** Among the studies reviewed, kindergarten students showed the biggest increase.

- **Helps children learn foundational reading skills** such as letter and word identification, phonemic awareness, and completion of sentences.

- **Prompts children to build reading stamina,** to read more frequently and for greater amounts of time.

- **Improves children's attitudes toward reading and learning** in general (Lindsay, 2010).

The researchers also suggest that a reciprocal relationship may exist between access and outcomes. In other words, providing interesting written materials to children increases their reading behavior and achievement, which in turn further increases their desire to read and acquire more books.

What About E-Books?

The fourth edition of the *Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report* was released in January 2013 and reflects the growing popularity of e-books. The highlights include:

- The percentage of children who have read an e-book has almost doubled since 2010 (25% vs. 46%).

- Among children who have read an e-book, one in five says he or she is reading more books for fun; boys are more likely to agree than girls (26% vs. 16%).

- Half of children aged 9 to 17 say they would read more books for fun if they had greater access to e-books—a 50% increase since 2010.

- 75% of kids who have read an e-book are reading e-books at home, with about one in four reading them at school.

- 72% of parents are interested in having their child read e-books.

- 80% of kids who read e-books still read books for fun primarily in print.

- Kids say that e-books are better than print books when they do not want their friends to know what they are reading, and when they are out and about/traveling; print is better for sharing with friends and reading at bedtime.

- 58% of kids aged nine to 17 say they will always want to read books printed on paper.

Closing Thoughts

One of the surest ways to break down the barriers between the rich and poor is to provide all children with access to books. Much of the information our children will need to succeed in our complex world isn't available through conversations and firsthand experience—it's available only through print. Neuman and Celano (2012) state firmly: Leveling the playing field isn't enough. We need to "tip it toward" those most in need.

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THE SUMMER SLIDE—OR READING LEAP!

"Access to books together with family engagement and teacher support enables all students to avoid the summer slide and, instead, make a summer leap!"

—Dr. Ernest Morrel, Teachers College, Columbia University

KEY FINDINGS

- As McGill-Franzen (2016) notes, "Free self-selected books can improve student reading performance and stop summer reading loss." Indeed, access to books all summer long can even create a summer reading leap (Morrell, 2016).

- The "summer slide" or "summer reading setback" is a simple reality for millions of low-income children, often with devastating results. It means that every summer, when school closes and these students no longer have access to books, they lose ground as readers.

- The decline is especially dramatic for students who are the most economically deprived (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2013). The less economic support the students have, the graver the consequences of the summer slide (McGill-Franzen, 2016; Shin and Krashen, 2008).

- Two-thirds of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to books (Alexander et al., 2007). At best, students showed little or no academic growth over summer. At worst, students lost one to three months of learning (Cooper et al., 2000; Kim, 2009).

- In addition, because the summer learning shortfall is cumulative (every summer, lower-income students slip further behind), it has consequences that reverberate throughout children's schooling and can affect whether a child ultimately earns a high school diploma and continues on to college (Alexander et al., 2007).

- Book distribution programs reveal the following (McGill-Franzen, 2016):
  - Book ownership is more powerful than book lending programs.
  - Providing parents with guidance demonstrates a high return on the investment.
  - Providing teachers with professional development on how to most effectively use trade books offers a robust return on investment.
  - Inviting student choice seems to increase the positive effects of book distribution, particularly on early reading skills (McGill-Franzen, 2016).

More to Know: The Challenge

Entwisle (1997) used a fall-to-spring assessment schedule and found that children who were more economically advantaged added 47 raw score points over a five-year period on summer vacation reading achievement tests during elementary school years, whereas children from financially strapped homes added only one point. Entwisle developed a "faucet theory" to explain the disparity. When the school faucet is turned on—that is, when schools are in session—children of every economic background benefit roughly equally, but when the school faucet is turned off, as during summer vacations, children from economically advantaged families continue to develop their reading proficiency, and economically disadvantaged children often do not.

Over a number of years, the accumulated summer loss adds up to a serious achievement gap between children with means (and books) and children without. Hayes and Grether (1983) estimated that as much as 80 percent of the reading achievement gap that existed between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students at sixth grade could be attributed to the summer setback. Alexander et al. (2007) and Allington and McGill-Franzen (2010, 2013, 2016) report similar findings.

Allington and McGill-Franzen (2010) sum it up:

> *Each of these studies suggested that summer reading setback is a major contributor to the existing reading achievement gap between more and less economically advantaged children—reading activity is the only factor that consistently correlated to reading gains during the summer.*

The Solution

- Research indicates that sending books home with children over the summer yields greater achievement gains and is less expensive and less extensive than providing summer school or engaging in comprehensive school reform (McGill-Franzen et al 2016; Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2013).

- Children who receive and read free books over the summer experience the equivalent of attending three years of summer school—and the difference in fall reading scores is twice as high among the poorest children in the study (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2013).

- When children are provided with 10 to 20 self-selected books at the end of the school year, as many as 50 percent not only maintain their skills, but actually make reading gains (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2013).

- In addition, the Scholastic *Kids and Family Reading Report* (2013) found:

  — 99% of parents think children their child's age should read over the summer.

  — 86% of children say they read a book (or books) over the summer.

  — On average, kids say they read 12 books over the summer.

Closing Thoughts

Summer readers also benefit from family reading support. Researchers James Kim (2009) and Freddy Hiebert (2014) note that giving children books is essential, but so too is providing the instructional scaffolding that children need to successfully read the books. Both educators recommend that parents, with help from their children's teachers, play an active role in supporting and interacting with their children as readers.

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CLASSROOM LIBRARIES

"Rather than waiting for students to discover the joys of the library, we must bring the books to the students. Students need to be surrounded by interesting books daily, not just on those occasional days when the teacher takes them to the library."

— Kelly Gallagher, high school English teacher and author

KEY FINDINGS

> "We need to offer children 'surround sound' reading. We need to give them the time and space to read like super readers every day of the week, every week of the month, every month of the year, in school and out of school" (Allyn and Morrell, 2016).

> "Excellent classroom libraries, school libraries, and public libraries are the cornerstone of a successful school reading program" (Routman, 2014).

> Elley (1992) examined reading data from 32 countries and found that those with high student scores supported large classroom and school libraries—and also provided students with easy access to books both at home and in the community. In 2012, Krashen et al. demonstrated that access to books in school and public libraries was a "significant predictor" of fourth-grade reading scores on both the 2007 NAEP and the 2006 PIRLS.

> "Students not only need to read a lot but they also need lots of enticing books that they can read right at their fingertips. Teachers can foster wide reading by creating school and classroom collections that provide a rich array of appropriate books and magazines—and by providing time every day for children to actually sit and read" (Allington, 2012).

> Students need enormous quantities of successful reading to become independent, proficient readers (Atwell and Merkel, 2016; Worthy and Roser, 2010; Gallagher, 2009; Kittle, 2013; Miller, 2009, 2013).

> Access to an abundance of books within the classroom results in increased motivation and increased reading achievement (Kelley and Clausen-Grace, 2010; Worthy and Roser, 2010; Guthrie, 2008; Routman, 2014).

More to Know: The Value of Book Floods

Children read **50-60% more** in classrooms with libraries than they do in classrooms without libraries.

We've long known that quality libraries have a positive impact on students' achievement (McGill-Franzen and Botzakis, 2009; Gallagher, 2009; Constantino, 2008; Atwell and Merkel, 2016; Williams, Wavell, and Coles, 2001; McQuillan, 1998; Elley, 1992).

In their article "Productive Sustained Reading in Bilingual Class" (2010), researchers Jo Worthy and Nancy Roser detail the ways in which they flooded a fifth-grade classroom in a diverse, high-poverty school, located in a southwest state, with books (Elley, 2000; Gallagher, 2009). Worthy and Roser spent a year monitoring and documenting the students' involvement with their new expansive classroom library and the opportunities it provided for sustained reading both in school and at home. The results were impressive: before the "book flood," only 27 percent of the students had passed the state achievement test as fourth-graders; after the book flood, all but one student passed the test and he missed by just one point.

At the International Association of School Librarians Conference held in Auckland, New Zealand, Ross Todd explored the relationship of libraries to academic achievement (2001). A library's impact is especially noteworthy when it serves as support for students' inquiry projects. Todd notes the outcomes when students are invited to follow a line of inquiry as they develop their control of information literacy (a key requirement of the new, rigorous standards across the grades). In this environment, students:

- Are better able to master content material.

- Develop more positive attitudes toward learning.

- Respond more actively to the opportunities in the learning environment.

- Are more likely to perceive themselves as active, constructive learners.

As Todd notes, "the hallmark of a library in the 21st century is … the difference [it makes] to student learning … [a library] contributes in tangible and significant ways to the development of human understanding, meaning making, and knowledge construction."

An analysis of data from the Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) to determine whether school libraries can reduce the effect of poverty on reading achievement yields a resounding yes. The results, together with other studies, confirm that:

- Variables related to libraries and reading are powerful predictors of reading test scores—to some extent, access to libraries and books can even overcome the challenges of poverty.

- One possible remedy to the socioeconomic gaps in academic achievement is to make sure that children of low-income families have access to high-quality, age-appropriate books. Having books facilitates children's reading (Lindsay, 2010).

- A common feature of effective reading programs is student access to a wide variety of appealing trade books and other reading materials (Allington, 2012).

- Highly effective literacy educators create print-rich classroom environments filled with lots of high-quality, diverse reading materials (Gambrell, et al., 2007).

- Internationally, most fourth-grade students (89%) attended schools with libraries and had classroom libraries (69%) (Overview of Progress in International Reading Literacy, 2007).

- Books are a vital component of a print-rich classroom environment (Wolfersberger, Reutzel, Sudweeks, and Fawson, 2004).

- Wide reading is directly related to accessibility. The more books available and the more time for reading, the more children will read and the better readers they will become (Huck, Helpler, Hickman, and Kiefer, 1997).

- Fielding, Wilson, and Anderson (1988) concluded that children's reading achievement, comprehension, and attitude toward reading improve when their classrooms are filled with trade books and their teachers encourage free reading.

- Large classroom and school libraries that provide ample collections of instructional-level books (Scholastic recommends 1,500) play a key role in literacy learning (Routman, 2014; Worthy and Roser; 2011; Gallagher, 2009; Miller, 2009, 2013; Atwell and Merkel, 2016).

In sum, if our students are to embrace their reading lives, they need easy access to an abundance of books across a wide range of genre, theme and topics. Veteran teacher Kelly Gallagher (2009) explains:

Placing students in a daily book flood zone produces much more reading than occasionally taking them to the library. There is something powerful about surrounding kids with interesting books. I have 2,000 books in my room, and because of this, my students do a lot more reading. Establishing a book flood is probably the single most important thing I have done in my teaching career.

Students in classrooms with well-designed classroom libraries:

- Interact more with books.
- Spend more time reading.
- Demonstrate more positive attitudes toward reading.
- Exhibit higher levels of reading achievement. (National Assessment of Educational Progress Report, 2005).

Closing Thoughts

Surrounding students with books in the classroom helps them develop a sense of themselves as readers (Miller, 2013) by:

- Allowing students to value their decision-making ability.
- Fostering their capacity to choose appropriate literature.
- Giving them confidence and a feeling of ownership.
- Improving reading achievement.
- Encouraging them to become lifelong readers.

Books open a world of possible. As author Marva Allen writes (2014),

"Books open the door to worlds before unimagined."

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HOME LIBRARIES

"A home with books as an integral part of the way of life encourages children to read for pleasure and encourages discussion among family members about what they have read, thereby providing children with information, vocabulary, imaginative richness, wide horizons, and skills for discovery and play."

—Dr. Mariah Evans, professor of sociology, University of Nevada, Reno

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Conducted over 20 years, Evans, Kelley, Sikorac, and Treimand (2010) surveyed more than 70,000 people across 27 countries and found that children raised in homes with more than 500 books spent three years longer in school than children whose parents had only a few books.

➤ Even a child who comes from a home with 25 books will, on average, complete two more years of school than would a child from a home without any books at all (Evans, et al., 2010).

➤ Research from the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (Mullis and Martin, 2007) shows a similar impact of books in the home. Surveying 215,000 students across 40 countries, PIRLS 2006 was one of the largest international assessments of reading literacy ever undertaken.

➤ Students thrived as readers when they were from homes where their parents enjoyed reading and read frequently, books were in abundance, and students were engaged in literacy activities—from alphabet blocks to word games—from an early age (Adams, 1990; Mullis and Martin, 2007).

➤ The only behavior measure that correlates significantly with reading scores is the number of books in the home. An analysis of a national data set of nearly 100,000 United States school children found that access to printed materials—and not poverty—is the "critical variable affecting reading acquisition" (McQuillan, 1998).

➤ Asking children to "show me your library" is powerful. Children think of themselves as readers when they have books in their homes—changing the literacy dynamic (Constantino, 2014).

More to Know: The Thousand Book Project

Second- and third-grade teacher Justin Minkel found a way, with help from Scholastic, to send 40 books home with every one of his students, almost all of whom were emerging bilinguals from low-income homes without a single book in their homes. Minkel, who titled his initiative "The Thousand Book Project" because he ultimately sent 1,000 books home with his students, explains the results:

> *Each of the 25 children in my class received 40 books over the course of second and third grade, for a total of 1,000 new books in their homes. The total cost for each student's home library was less than $50 each year, a small investment to move a struggling reader from frustration to confidence. These 25 students made more progress in their reading than I have experienced with any other class. By the end of the project's second year, they had exceeded the district expectation for growth by an average of nine levels on the DRA and five points on the computerized Measures of Academic Progress reading test. Increasing this number to 40 or more books had far-reaching effects. Students' fluency improved because the children could engage in repeated readings of favorite "just right" books, and parents reported increased time spent reading at home during weekends, holidays, and summer break. The only incentive for this increase in reading time was intrinsic: the pleasure each child felt in reading his or her own book, beloved as a favorite stuffed animal.*

Closing Thoughts

Minkel notes that he's learned four fundamental truths that enable him to do his job: he builds a relationship with every child he teaches, listens carefully to what each child says, laughs as much as possible, and finally: "To help kids develop a love of reading, put great books in their hands. Then watch in amazement as their worlds change."

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GENRE AND TEXT TYPES

"Genres are containers for thinking. They help us to orient ourselves to the kind of story we are hearing and its purpose."

—Pam Allyn, literacy advocate, educational leader, and author

KEY FINDINGS

➤ In order to become competent, literate members of society, students must be able to navigate multiple genres (Lattimer, 2003).

➤ Children learn language, both oral and written, when they have a reason to use it. Linguist M. A. K. Halliday (1973) argues that the explanation of how language works should be grounded in a functional analysis, since language evolved as human beings carried out certain critical functions. He also maintains that children are motivated to develop language because it serves certain purposes or functions for them.

➤ Learning written language is also driven by function and purpose. Nell Duke, et al. (2012) argue that children learn the concept of genre when they have "compelling, real-world purposes … to use genres" and then receive "instruction in genre features and strategies to serve those purposes."

➤ Language is inherently social; thus, genres enable social interaction. Genres "develop and function to enable social interaction." For example, in the context of classroom talk, "teacher storytelling" is a genre used to socialize children—to help them understand and accept cultural values and beliefs (Duke, et al., 2012).

➤ Genres or text types are broadly defined by their purpose. Even young children recognize the difference between a cookbook recipe and the Bible, the *TV Guide* and a storybook. (Duke et al., 2012). Children learn these genre differences as they use language to navigate the world (Duke, 2014).

More to Know: Language Is Functional

Today's rigorous standards focus our attention on the functions of language, as there is renewed interest and emphasis in the classroom on using language to accomplish specific goals. These standards divide texts into two primary types: fiction and informational/nonfiction. When students are working with fictional texts (Fuhler and Walther, 2007), they are following and remembering multiple events in a story, summarizing texts, noticing and remembering details of the setting, discussing the impact of the setting on characters, and noting the perspective of the various characters as well as the narrator. Examples of fictional genre include:

- Fables, folktales, and myths
- Realistic fiction
- Historical fiction
- Science fiction
- Poetry
- Drama
- Fantasy
- Fairy tales

When students are engaged with informational texts, on the other hand, they learn to search for and use key information, to summarize a text, to draw inferences from a text, and to use these inferences to explain the relationships between events and ideas. Examples of informational texts include:

- Current events
- Biography, autobiography, memoirs
- Science
- History
- Functional texts

Of course, within these broad categories, there are many text types, or genres, each with their own unique structure, vocabulary, and format. Which genre we choose to use typically depends on both our purpose and our audience (Duke, 2014; Fountas and Pinnell, 2012). To consider how purpose and audience influence genre and text type, consider literacy researchers Armistead-Bennett, Duke, and Moses' observation:

"A text written for the purpose of advertising a new car, for example, is fundamentally different from a text written for the purpose of explaining how that car works, which is in turn fundamentally different from a text that chronicles someone's adventures driving that car across the country" (2005).

These texts serve different purposes, are written for different situations, and feature different characteristics, including text structure, presentational formats, design and layouts, vocabulary, illustrations and graphics, and so forth.

Closing Thoughts

Genre research reveals that even young children are sensitive to differences in text format and structure. Ask a four-year-old to write a shopping list for a trip to the grocery store and she will inevitably create a vertical list, perhaps with numbers or bullet points before each needed item (Harste, Woodward, and Burke, 1984). Even though the child is using pretend writing to create her list, she demonstrates that she is well aware of the particular features of "list-ness," which typically include a vertical display of listed words or phrases (rather than connected text) accentuated by bullet points (Duke and Purcell-Gates, 2003).

Finally, John Mayher (2001) reminds us that learning to read is a lifelong process. Over the course of our lives, we'll meet numerous texts that challenge our focus and comprehension (computer programming manuals, tax forms, warranty tags, and the like). As Mayher notes, "Reading is not something that one learns to do once in elementary school; it is a lifelong process of growth as one meets the challenges of new texts."

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AUTHENTIC TEXTS AND TEXT COMPLEXITY

"Read often. Mostly silent. Focus on knowledge."

—Dr. Elfrieda (Freddy) Hiebert, president and CEO of TextProject

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Children deserve access to authentic texts—children's literature or classroom magazines that are written for a real purpose: to entertain, to inform, to instruct, to persuade, etc. These are texts that invite active reading, robust problem-solving, and deep analysis because they comprise compelling ideas and living language—a fact well understood and promoted by cognitive psychologists and education researchers for decades (Bridges, 2018).

➤ Al Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) call authentic texts "vital" to language learning. Nuttall (1996) agrees: "Authentic texts are motivating, because they are a proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people."

➤ Early literacy expert Lesley Morrow, who defines authentic texts as, "A stretch of real language produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort" (1977), also notes their indispensable role in the early childhood classroom.

➤ Additionally, when it comes to supporting the needs of emerging bilinguals, authentic texts are also much preferred. "Teachers of English are advised to provide their students with different sources of authentic materials to increase their interest and motivation because authentic materials are closer to students' real life than non-authentic materials" (Baniabdelrahman, 2006).

➤ Authentic texts are never contrived; in other words, they aren't texts that are written or assembled for the sole purpose of teaching reading or delivering a set of skills. They're texts crafted by a real author, typically a skilled writer, who uses language in which all four language systems are in place—graphophonemic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic—to craft a story or develop an informational text.

➤ This authentic "complete language" makes it easier and more engaging for children to read because real language is redundant and predictable, providing natural scaffolding for the reader. When we tinker with language for instructional purposes, attempting to "simplify" text such as by shortening each sentence, removing clausal phrases, or using only phonetically regular vocabulary, we compromise the integrity of authentic language and its natural scaffolding.

➤ Authentic texts are conceptually and linguistically rich (Sullivan and Brown, 2013; Kidd and Castano, 2013). They:

- Strengthen students' analytical problem-solving ability.
- Spark their intellectual curiosity.
- Deepen their understanding of the world .
- Feed their imaginations.
- Expand their vocabularies.
- Build agency and their reading identity .
- Help them become better readers, writers, spellers, grammarians, mathematicians, better human beings, and more compassionate and engaged citizens.

More to Know: The Vocabulary in Authentic Texts

Authentic texts invite active reading, robust problem-solving, and deep analysis because they comprise compelling ideas and living language. Again, the living language of authentic texts is conceptually rich, and since children's vocabulary and conceptual knowledge of the world are largely shaped by reading, we want them to have access to the richest texts possible. Children's conception of the world is rooted in literature—they learn about the world beyond their own homes and experiences through reading.

- Incidental word learning accounts for a large percentage of all new words learned. Estimates are that each year children learn on average 3,000 words, only about 300 of which are explicitly taught to them in school (Biemiller, 2001). As Hiebert writes in her book, *Learning Words and How They Work*, "The development of a large vocabulary comes from reading."

- "One of the most enduring findings in reading research is the extent to which student vocabulary knowledge relates to their reading comprehension" (Adams, 2011; Hiebert, 2018). The larger and more complex student's vocabulary, the easier it is to comprehend more challenging texts.

- Children learn words that they experience. This is one of the clear benefits of reading authentic texts—they expose children to words not normally heard in child-directed speech. An analysis of a picture book database demonstrates that the vocabulary in picture books includes many more rare, complex words (also known as Tier II and Tier III words) than found in child-directed speech. Tier II and III words tend to be more complex and cognitively challenging than common words and, therefore, provide children with an opportunity to stretch their vocabulary (Adams, 2011; Hayes 1996),

- Making reading material for children easier—shortening the sentences and using phonetically regular vocabulary—"denies students the very language, information, and modes of thought they need most to move up and on" (Adams, 2011).

- In general, authentic text materials are intrinsically more interesting and more stimulating in comparison to contrived texts, as authentic texts reflect the real culture, knowledge, and values of the sociocultural community in which they were written (Baniabdelrahman, 2005).

More to Know: Tackling Complex Texts

Language researcher Freddy Hiebert (2012) lists a set of teaching actions to help students engage with complex texts and glean the support they need to develop as more capable readers in control of even domain-specific, challenging texts. These teaching actions include:

- Consistent opportunities with texts that support capacity with core vocabulary.

- Direct instruction that extends vocabularies in informational and narrative texts.

- Opportunities to increase reading stamina.

- Support in developing funds of knowledge (the background knowledge necessary to comprehend the textual content).

Students' ability to handle complex texts doesn't necessarily develop in a linear fashion. For example, if our students are deeply interested in humpback whales, their interest may sustain them in a text on that topic that otherwise would be too challenging. In general, teachers will want to look for ways to stretch students' experience across a range of texts, keeping in mind their students' motivation, knowledge, prior reading, and the natural redundancy of whole texts (Goodman and Bridges, 2014; Bridges, 2013).

What Is Close Reading?

Kylene Beers and Bob Probst (2013) offer a commonsense explanation: "Close reading should suggest close attention to the text; close attention to the relevant experience, thought, and memory of the reader; close attention to the responses and interpretations of other readers; and close attention to the interactions among those elements." They offer five characteristics of close reading:

- It works with a short passage.

- The focus is intense.

- It will extend from the passage itself to other parts of the text.

- It should involve a great deal of exploratory discussion.

- It involves rereading.

To help students build capacity with increasingly complex texts and close reading across both fiction and nonfiction, Hiebert (2011) recommends two corresponding goals:

- Undertake the close, attentive reading that lies at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature.

- Perform the critical reading necessary to analyze the staggering amount of information available digitally and in print.

Given the emphasis on close reading and rereading, many teachers are introducing short texts into the reading menu. Shorter, challenging texts that elicit close reading and rereading draw students from varying ability levels together in a close analysis of more demanding texts. In this way, students can read and reread deliberately while they probe and ponder the meanings of individual words, the order in which sentences unfold, and the development of ideas over the course of the text. To this end, Atwell and Merkel (2016) recommend poetry.

Closing Thoughts

Although experienced teachers have long engaged their students in a close reading of texts, the ELA standards take close reading to a whole new level, maintaining that reading requires "close scrutiny" of the text through reading and rereading. Teachers are encouraged to guide lessons with a high percentage of text-dependent questions that require students to use the author's words and evidence drawn directly from the text to support their responses. Students are invited to meld the structure of a work with its meaning, while also paying special attention to the unique features of each text, including, in the case of nonfiction, such structural elements as headings, sidebars, graphics, captions, and quick-read essential facts (Lehmann and Roberts, 2013; Robb, 2013).

Still, Beers and Probst (2013) caution: text complexity and close reading is not just about Lexile levels and the "four corners of the page." It's the transaction between the reader and the text that not only creates meaning but creates the reason to read. For this reason, Beers and Probst suggest that the key is prompting students to ask their own questions, to live inside the text, noticing everything, questioning everything, and weighing everything they are reading against their lives, the lives of others, and the world around them.

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NONFICTION

"I was absolutely gobsmacked. In Volume 1 (A to Anno) alone, I could learn about abbeys, aerial navigation, Africa, and angling."

—Dr. Elfrieda (Freddy) Hiebert, president and CEO of TextProject

KEY FINDINGS

- ➤ Nonfiction texts—informational because they impart facts—serve innumerable functions, come in dozens and dozens of genres and formats, and reflect a dazzling array of structural patterns and design features (Duke, 2012, 2014).

- ➤ Beers and Probst (2016) define nonfiction as "that body of work in which the author purports to tell us about the real world, a real experience, a real person, an idea, or a belief."

- ➤ Language researcher Nell Duke (2014) maintains that the best way to help students build skills in reading and writing major informational text types—informative/explanatory persuasive, opinion procedural/how-to nonfiction narrative, and biography—is through project-based instruction. Children read and write for real purposes and real audiences on topics that matter to them.

- ➤ There may be no better, more efficient way to build world knowledge and an extensive vocabulary than processing lots and lots of informational texts. Since informational texts are written to convey key facts about the natural and social world and often contain a highly specialized vocabulary, they provide a jump start to building both a robust vocabulary and wide-ranging conceptual knowledge for even very young children (Duke and Carlisle, 2011).

- ➤ Informational texts are often discontinuous in nature; that is, unlike sentences and paragraphs inside a narrative text, they may stand alone—not part of a rich semantic network of connected sentences. And this discontinuity may well alter the ways in which comprehension unfolds—hence, the need to immerse students in informational texts and give them the opportunity to explore (Bestgen and Vonk, 1999).

- ➤ The quality of nonfiction in recent years has increased tenfold. Now our students can feast on beautifully written, full-of-voice books replete with stunning illustrations and intriguing graphics (Duke, 2014).

More to Know: The Benefits of Informational Texts

An infusion of informational texts—particularly about topics that stoke students' interests—may be the easiest way to build students' conceptual knowledge and vocabulary base, which is essential for comprehension in general (Duke and Carlisle, 2011)—and this may be especially true for challenged readers and emerging bilinguals who can benefit from informational texts in ways not possible with fiction. Vulnerable readers or new-to-English readers may be challenged by their developing English vocabularies, making processing complex fictional narratives difficult. Informational texts feature headers, labels, sidebars, and diagrams that scaffold readers, enabling them to more easily navigate the text and access the content. Not surprisingly, many students prefer to read informational texts. This may be truer than ever, given its abundance, particularly in a digital format, and may also be especially true for boys (Allyn, 2011).

Indeed, as Fountas and Pinnell (2012) explain, all readers need the reading workout that nonfiction offers:

> As students process nonfiction texts, they learn to adjust their reading according to the purpose, style, and type of text. This flexibility expands their reading ability. Complex nonfiction texts present a challenge to students partly because of their great variety and also because of the many ways writers can crafts texts to provide information. It takes many years for readers to become skilled in reading the various genres and types of nonfiction texts.

In general, reading lots of nonfiction—and learning to navigate different informational text types and formats—is the best way to learn how to access, use, and apply nonfiction genres. Furthermore, nonfiction may be our best and most efficient way to build "world knowledge and an extensive vocabulary. Informational texts are written "to convey key facts about the natural and social world" (Duke and Carlisle, 2011). To that end, they often reflects a highly specialized, domain-specific vocabulary, helping teens develop a robust vocabulary and wide-ranging conceptual knowledge (Fountas and Pinnell, 2012).

Because nonfiction texts can also be literary, they provide our young teens with superb models of exquisite language. For example, nonfiction writers may "employ many of the techniques of the writer's craft: figurative language, lyrical description, unique or surprising comparisons, and interesting ways of organizing and presenting information" (Fountas and Pinnell, 2012).

Duke (2014) reminds us that to do the "hard cognitive work of informational text." Students need "compelling purposes and contexts for informational reading and writing."

Closing Thoughts

Informational texts—defined by literacy researcher Nell Duke (2014) as texts that convey information about the natural or social world and feature particular linguistic components to accomplish that purpose—may well be the key to academic success. Children who become familiar with informational texts at an early age are more likely to demonstrate stronger academic success in fourth grade and beyond when they begin to encounter textbooks and other informational texts. More than ever, since our lives are informed, shaped, and even driven by informational texts, it seems wise to introduce children to informational texts from the very beginning of their schooling career. The following is adapted from Duke and Bennett-Armistead, 2003:

- **Informational Texts Are Ubiquitous in American Society**
  Indeed, 96% of the text on the Web is informational, and adults tend to focus on expository text. Given our increasingly information-oriented economy, the emphasis on informational texts is only likely to increase. As we work to prepare our students for the world beyond school, we need to consider how best to help them read and write informational texts right from the beginning.

- **Informational Texts Differ in Profound Ways from Fictional Narrative— Structurally, Linguistically, and Graphically**
  In fact, the ways in which we navigate informational texts, which are often non-continuous (think of schedules and maps), requires experience and skill (Beers and Probst, 2016; Duke 2014; Fountas and Pinnell, 2012). You can help children learn their way around informational texts by using the same instructional structures that you use for the interactive read-aloud, book clubs, and everyday literacy.

- **Informational Text Builds Vocabulary and Other Kinds of Literary Knowledge**
  The vocabulary found in informational texts differs significantly from that typically found in narrative, and—because it may be technical since it is related to the content of informational texts—it may be unfamiliar to children (Duke and Kays, 1998; Hiebert, 2006). Because vocabulary and reading comprehension are strongly related (Bauman, 2009), children benefit from the exposure to the language of informational text. For this reason, "Informational texts may be particularly well-suited to building children's word knowledge."

- **Informational Texts Build Wide-Ranging Knowledge of the World**
  Children also benefit from the wide-ranging world knowledge that informational texts provide. Comprehension is strongly influenced by what one knows (Duke and Pearson, 2002), thus proficient readers tend to have more expansive world knowledge. Again, we see the benefits of introducing even young children to content-rich informational texts (Duke and Carlisle, 2011).

- **Informational Texts Are Preferred Reading Materials for Many Children**
  Jobe and Dayton-Sakari (2002) coined the term "Info-Kids" to describe those kids who prefer informational texts to fictional. Including more informational texts in classrooms may improve attitudes toward reading and even serve as a catalyst for overall literacy development. Not surprisingly, then, approaches that emphasize reading for the purpose of addressing real questions that children have about their world tend to lead to higher achievement and motivation (Guthrie, 2008). Including more informational texts in the primary classrooms may help us address the interests and questions of more of our students.

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FICTION

"Great stories are not only measured by how compelling the characters or dilemmas are; the true test is how they help us understand our deepest selves and our relationship to the world and others around us."

—Farin Houk, founder and head of Seattle Amistad School

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Stories help [students] make connections to both unique and shared experiences and to other points of view (Gallagher, 2014).

➤ Fiction makes us more empathic human beings (Djikic, Oatley, and Modovenanu, 2013; Oatley, 2014).

➤ Reading *Harry Potter* reduces prejudice. "Results from one experimental intervention and two cross-sectional studies show that reading the *Harry Potter* novels improves attitudes toward stigmatized groups among those more identified with the main positive character and those less identified with the main negative character. We also found evidence for the role of perspective taking as the process allowing the improvement of out-group attitudes" (Vezzali, et al., 2014).

➤ "In 2013, an influential study published in *Science* found that reading literary fiction improved participants' results on tests that measured social perception and empathy, which are crucial to 'theory of mind'—the ability to guess with accuracy what another human being might be thinking or feeling, a skill humans only start to develop around the age of four" (Dovey, 2015).

➤ "Fiction and poetry are doses, medicines," the author Jeanette Winterson has written. "What they heal is the rupture reality makes on the imagination" (Dovey, 2015).

➤ "Fiction opens our minds to the creative process, enhances our vocabulary, influences our emotions, and strengthens our cognitive functions" (Oatley, 2014).

➤ For many, fiction is the gateway to proficient reading because it's fiction, so often, that encourages avid, voluminous reading (Gaiman, 2013).

More to Know: Fiction Lets Us *Be* More

Kylene Beers notes that although nonfiction helps us learn more, fiction lets us *be* more. Author Neil Gaiman (2013) suggests two profound reasons this might be so. First, for many readers, fiction is the doorway to proficient reading:

> *The drive to know what happens next, to want to turn the page, the need to keep going, even if it's hard, because someone's in trouble, and you have to know how it's all going to end … that's a very real drive. And it forces you to learn new words, to think new thoughts, to keep going. To discover that reading per se is pleasurable. Once you learn that, you're on the road to reading everything.*

And we know that avid, voluminous readers possess a deep knowledge of the world as they encounter—through their wide reading—events, people, and issues well beyond the narrow confines of their own lived experience.

Second, fiction develops empathy—and there's research to prove it. Djikic, Oatley, and Moldoveanu (2013) found that their research participants, who were frequent fiction readers, had higher scores on a measure of empathy. The results suggest "a role for fictional literature in facilitating development of empathy." Again, Gaiman weighs in:

> *Prose fiction is something you build up from 26 letters and a handful of punctuation marks, and you … using your imagination, create a world and people it and look out through other eyes. You get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone else out there is a "me" as well. You're being someone else, and when you return to your own world, you're going to be slightly changed. …You're also finding out something as you read vitally important for making your way in the world. And it's this: The world doesn't have to be like this. Things can be different.*

Indeed, the key point is that we can be different; fiction moves us to change—not just to have a more expansive understanding of the world—but our personal reality. Who would have thought brain scans and fiction could work together to tell a story, but that's just what cognitive scientist Keith Oatley's research has done. He explains:

> *Brain scans are revealing what happens in our heads when we read a detailed description, an evocative metaphor, or an emotional exchange between characters. Stories … stimulate the brain and even change how we act in life.*

That's because our brains are, in a sense, fooled—they aren't able to differentiate between the fictional experience and the real-life event. What's more, the social experiences we encounter through a character's point of view help ready us for social interactions with the real people in our lives:

> *Fiction is particularly useful simulation because negotiating the social world effectively is extremely tricky, requiring us to weigh up myriad interacting instances of cause and effect. Just as computer simulations can help us get to grips with complex problems such as flying a plane or forecasting the weather, so novels, stories, and dramas can help us understand the complexities of social life* (Oatley, 2014).

What About Literary/Textual Analysis?

Higher reading standards maintain that the deep work of reading should include textual analysis, a method of criticism that analyzes the details of texts in order to reveal their structure and meaning. In fiction, we examine literary elements such as plot, setting, character, theme, and figurative language to dig deeper into our interpretation of the text. In nonfiction, we investigate domain-specific vocabulary and text features, such as photographs and illustrations, graphs, maps, sidebars, inset boxes, timelines, and captions. Although textual/literary analysis may enhance our students' appreciation and enjoyment of reading, it also promotes the high-level, critical comprehension that is essential across all aspects of life and career—it's an essential workout for learning how to think.

Literature expert Dr. Glenna Sloan (2003) explains the central role of fictional literature—and literary analysis—in our lives:

> *The aim of the study of literature is not to develop professional reviewers, scholars, or researchers. The aim is more fully developed human beings. Genuine criticism is a systematic study that treats literature as an art. It involves talking about literature in a way that will build up a systematic structure of knowledge of literature, taking the student beyond the subjectivity of his experience out into a wider, more comprehensive world.*

Knowing how to enter and navigate this wider, more comprehensive world requires close reading and rereading, taking notes, and asking questions. It also means understanding the structure of fiction and nonfiction and how the two text types work, and learning to understand and use the language of textual analysis. Such explicit analysis can be demanding; however, it's also exhilarating as children learn to dig deep into a text and consider why and how an author has chosen specific words, stretched sentences and syntax just so, presented information in a particular graphic format, and released characters into unique settings and circumstances to create a world on a page that elicits a particular response in each reader (Beers and Probst, 2013).

Students learn how to analyze increasingly complex texts across the spectrum of literary and textual elements with thoughtful teacher support and precise instruction delivered at the point of need. As Carol Jago reminds us, if we want our students to have the stamina to read complex texts and achieve high-level comprehension, we need to help our students "increase their capacity to concentrate and contemplate" (2011). To that end, having access

to the tools of textual analysis—and whole text, both fiction and nonfiction—is an essential first step (Seravallo, 2012; 2013).

Closing Thoughts

Kidd and Comer (2013) note the role of fiction to "promote social welfare," such as developing empathy in doctors and life skills in prisoners. Fiction has been, of course, the mainstay of secondary English coursework. For this reason, some question the push-away from fiction to embrace as much as 70 percent nonfiction in high school. Kidd and Comer end with this challenge:

> *Debates over the social value of types of fiction and the arts more broadly are important, and it seems critical to supplement them with empirical research. These results show that reading literary fiction may hone adults' ToM [Theory of the Mind], a complex and critical social capacity.*

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Did you know?

• • •

Based on their meta-analysis of

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EMPIRICAL CLASSROOM STUDIES,

researchers found that talk about text **benefits** student **comprehension** and **learning**.

> " The central and most important goal of reading instruction is to foster a love of reading.

—Dr. Linda Gambrell, distinguished professor of education, Clemson University

Chapter 5
TEACH

- ➤ Interactive Read-Aloud
- ➤ Guided Reading
- ➤ Text Sets
- ➤ Facilitated Book Clubs
- ➤ Reading and Writing Connections

INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUDS IN THE CLASSROOM

"If we wish to help children and adolescents become thoughtfully literate, classroom talk around texts is critical."

—Dr. Richard Allington, University of Tennessee

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KEY FINDINGS

➤ After evaluating 10,000 research studies, the U.S. Department of Education's Commission on Reading issued a report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985). It states: "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children." The study found conclusive evidence supporting reading aloud in the home and in the classroom. Adults need to read aloud to children not just when children can't yet read on their own, but across all the grade levels (Anderson et al., 1985).

➤ Just as the name suggests, the read-aloud is truly interactive. As teachers read aloud to children, they stop only briefly and just a few times so as not to lose the momentum of the story. At the same time, teachers invite children to participate, make comments, extend the ideas of the author, and ask and respond to questions. In this way, children build more intricate networks of meaning than they could have accomplished on their own (Scharer et al. 2018).

➤ Researchers maintain that one of the most valuable aspects of the read-aloud is the experience it gives young children with decontextualized language, requiring them to make sense of ideas that are about something beyond the here and now (Beck and McKeown, 2001).

➤ The interactive read-aloud builds student vocabulary (Beck and McKeown, 2001), comprehension strategies, story schema (Scharer et al., 2018; Lever, and Sénéchal, 2011), and concept development (Wasik and Bond, 2001; Bennett-Armistead, Duke, and Moses, 2005).

➤ Simply inviting children to talk during interactive read-alouds doesn't provide the needed learning boost. It's the close reading—and deep, intentional conversation about the text—that makes the difference (Scharer et al., 2018; Bennett-Armistead, Duke, and Moses, 2005; Pinnell and Fountas, 2011; Cunningham and Zilbusky, 2014).

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More to Know: The Learning Potential of the Interactive Read-Aloud

Wasik and Bond (2001) investigated the learning potential of the interactive read-aloud. Their study, which included 121 four-year-old children from low-income families (94 percent of whom were African American), engaged the treatment group in interactive book reading and extension activities. The interactive read-aloud included defining vocabulary words, providing opportunities for children to use words from the books, asking open-ended questions, and giving children the chance to talk and be heard.

Children enter school able to think and reason about the world in situations that make sense to them. In school, however, they learn to think and reason in "disembedded contexts"—to use symbol systems and deal with representations of the world. The control teachers received all the books that treatment teachers did. These books were read as often in control classrooms as they were in treatment classrooms; however, control teachers did not receive the interactive read-aloud training that treatment teachers did.

For the first four weeks of the intervention, an experienced teacher modeled the shared book reading techniques in each treatment classroom and assisted with reading extension activities. For the next 11 weeks, treatment teachers ran the program on their own. At post-test, treatment classes scored significantly higher on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary than control classes did. Treatment classes also scored significantly higher on their knowledge of target vocabulary words. Classroom observations found that teachers in the treatment group were significantly more likely than control teachers to use the target words during related activities.

The Power of Talk

Just at the name suggests, the read-aloud is truly interactive. As teachers read aloud to their students, they invite them to participate, make comments, extend the ideas of their peers, evaluate the author's point of view, and ask and respond to questions. In ways that are akin to an orchestra conductor, teachers orchestrate the conversation, which may include asking their students to "turn and talk" with a neighbor about their thinking (Harvey and Ward, 2017; Hoyt, 2007). As students follow their teacher's modeling and participate in safe, scaffolded book conversations, students quickly learn how to comment, critique, and claim their own thoughts beyond the usual "I liked it" or "I didn't like it." In this way, students build a more intricate network of meaning than they could have accomplished on their own (Scharer et al., 2018; Laminack, 2016; Laminack and Wadsworth, 2006; Whitehurst et al., 1992; Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, and Freppon, 1995).

During an interactive read-aloud, students learn how to:

- Focus on the text.

- Use suitable words when talking about a text.

- Listen actively and respect others' ideas.

- Build on others' comments.

- Back up their opinions with evidence from the text.

Through active participation, students learn that they are expected to respond to one another's comments; indeed, the expectation is clear: everyone participates.

The Research behind the Interactive Read-Aloud

Known as dialogic or interactive, read-alouds result in student gains in vocabulary (Bennett-Armistead, 2007), comprehension strategies and story schema (Van den Broek, 2001), and concept development (Wasik and Bond, 2001; Scharer et al., 2018). Close reading, textual analysis, and deep, intentional conversation about the text (Dickinson and Smith, 1994; Scharer et al., 2018; Lehman and Roberts, 2013) draw students into the text. Fountas and Pinnell invite students to think deeply about text using a three-part framework: thinking within the text, beyond the text, and about the text.

The Interactive Read-Aloud: Vital Support for Middle School Students

While the interactive read-aloud is widely regarded as an ideal instructional strategy for younger children, it offers vital, indispensable support for readers of all ages—including secondary students. Maureen McLaughlin, past president of the International Reading Association (2013-14), writes:

> *As teachers, we can read aloud to students beginning in the early grades and continuing right through high school and on to the university level. Interactive read-alouds and related discussions engage students, increase understanding, and stimulate higher-order thinking.*

Literacy educators Frank Serafini and Cyndi Giorgis, authors of *Reading Aloud and Beyond: Fostering the Intellectual Life of Older Readers* (2003), also champion the read-aloud for middle schoolers. They note that the read-aloud supports both reading and writing development and fosters a love of reading. They write, "Reading aloud is just as important for older readers as it is for younger ones and should occur every day, into the intermediate-grade classrooms and beyond." Middle school teacher Jamie Marsh, writing with co-author Linda Ellis (2007), agrees:

"Reading aloud should never end in elementary school. Reading gets more complex as students move up through the grades and the expectations we have of them as readers continue to grow. This is important teaching—modeling what good readers do naturally, then sending students out to read with those models fresh in their minds. It builds the enthusiasm for reading and the skills and strategies needed to become readers who get lost in a book."

Short and Extended Texts

And though we may be more familiar with reading aloud chapter books with older students, Scharer et al., (2018) remind us of the power of short texts, including picture books, for readers of all ages:

> *We advocate using beautiful, content-rich, age- and grade-appropriate picture books—short stories or poetry or short informational pieces illustrated with beautiful art—as a foundation for thinking, talking, and writing.*

Secondary teacher Penny Kittle depends on both read-alouds and book talks—often with short texts—as the best way to lure her students into reading and convince them to become readers with their own rich and fulfilling reading lives. In her tribute to the joy of reading—*Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers* (2013)—she reminds us that "reading aloud is the most important foundation in teaching writing." She frequently reads aloud poetry and other short texts as a way to help her students learn to crack open and analyze a text with their own writing in mind.

What the Read-Aloud Accomplishes

The interactive read-aloud is multifaceted. It lends itself to both extended chapter books as well as short texts such as poetry, magazine articles, and short stories—and it offers a range of benefits to all readers. Laminack (2016) demonstrates that the interactive read-aloud accomplishes multiple, essential instructional goals simultaneously by:

- Drawing all students into the text.
- Capturing the interest of disengaged readers.
- Expanding students' reading horizons by exposing them to new books, authors, and genres.
- Furnishing background information.
- Refining students' understanding of texts—genre, format, literary elements, text structures, and features.
- Promoting inquiry.
- Teaching essential strategic reading actions.
- Encouraging students to view topics from multiple perspectives.
- Improving listening comprehension.

- Building academic vocabulary.

- Deepening comprehension.

- Modeling all aspects of thinking, talking, and writing about reading.

- Demonstrating fluent reading.

- Building an intellectual classroom community of readers.

- Introducing and modeling collaborative conversations.

- Addressing the requirements of the new rigorous standards.

- Fostering a lifelong love of reading.

Closing Thoughts

At the beginning of *The Ultimate Read-Aloud Resource* (2016), Lester Laminack addresses teachers directly and encapsulates the heart of the interactive read-aloud:

> *You are the front line in the work of leading children to fall in love with language and literature as they become readers and writers. You are the ones who select the books, who set the tone of the experience, who lure children into a web of texts of all kinds. As teachers you are the daily dose of read aloud. Your voices are the ones that linger in the minds of children as they romp around on the playground, stand in line for lunch, or load onto the bus and head for home at the end of the day. You are the ones who introduce new topics and revisit favorite authors and illustrators or bring in new ones. You are the ones who deepen children's understanding of genre and open the doors to new ways of looking at life and the world around us.*

And kindergarten teacher Aeriale Johnson (2018) reminds us that as "professional educators, we have a lot of power. We can use it to limit children to our narrow paradigms, or we can respect their intellectual capacity and fullness as human beings and invite them to co-create a cultural landscape in our classrooms wherein books are valued as friends. We can model, even with our youngest readers, through thoughtful read-alouds, how our book friends render feelings of comfort and joy and provide safe spaces within which children and adults alike can find independence, interdependence, and growth. As one of my students said: "Reading is better than food."

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GUIDED READING

"The aim of guided reading is to develop independent readers who question, consider alternatives, and make informed choices as they seek meaning."

—Dr. Margaret Mooney, literacy educator and author

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Guided reading places students on an accelerated course to independent reading with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Scharer et al., 2018; Richardson, 2016).

➤ Guided reading is potent, strategic, and differentiated small-group reading instruction, and its aim is clear: to help readers process—accurately, proficiently, and independently—increasingly challenging, conceptually rich, complex texts on grade level (Scharer et al., 2018; Richardson, 2016).

➤ Guided reading also acknowledges that children bring different backgrounds and instructional experiences to the reading process and therefore move forward at different rates. The small-group model allows teachers to target specific learning needs, provide appropriate scaffolding, and gradually reduce support to promote independence. Guided reading essentials include small groups, instructional-leveled texts, and targeted teaching" (Richardson, 2016).

➤ Based on 40 years of irrefutable research drawing from cognitive science and the linguistic principles that inform our understanding of language and literacy development (Clay, 1976, 2001; Holdaway, 1979, Mooney, 1990, Fountas and Pinnell, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2010, 2017; Johnston, 2010; Allington, 2012), guided reading supports all readers: challenged, gifted, and those for whom English is a target language (Scharer et al., 2018).

➤ "After systematic assessment to determine their strengths and needs, students are grouped for efficient reading instruction. While individuals always vary, the students in the group are alike enough that they can be effectively taught in a group. Texts are selected from a collection arranged along a gradient of difficulty. The teacher selects a text that students will be able to process successfully with instruction" (Pinnell and Fountas, 2017).

More to Know: Guided Reading Creates Confident Independent Readers

Guided reading is smart, differentiated reading instruction that centers on a close read of texts, literary conversation, and, at times, writing about the reading—which aligns with higher standards that call for integrated language arts. This approach is a fast track to successful, independent grade-level reading and an indispensable first step to helping students achieve the primary objective of new rigorous reading standards: to read and comprehend independently and proficiently the kinds of complex texts commonly found in college and on the job.

Guided reading teachers are well on their way to helping students accomplish this essential goal. Based on 40 years of irrefutable research, drawing from cognitive science and the linguistic principles that inform our understanding of language and literacy development (Clay, 1976, 2001; Holdaway, 1979; Mooney, 1990; Scharer et al., 2018; Richardson, 2016; Fountas and Pinnell, 2017; Johnston, 2010; Allington, 2012), guided reading supports all readers: challenged, gifted, and those for whom English is a target language.

The basic tenets of guided reading are straightforward:

- Students learn to read by reading.
- The role of texts is pivotal.
- Students engage in close reading and, as needed, reread to check up on meaning and search for text-based evidence.
- Reading accuracy, fluency, and academic vocabulary reflect proficient reading.
- The teacher is a responsive instructor, in sync with each student's instructional trajectory.
- The teacher knows when to step back and remove instructional scaffolds, enabling the student to take off on his or her own as an independent reader.

Researcher Anita Ilaquinata describes guided reading as one of the "most important contemporary reading instructional practices in the United States" (Fawson and Reutzel, 2000). Simply stated, guided reading has propelled hundreds of thousands of children into proficient independent reading.

Teaching with a Sense of Urgency

As many as one in three children find learning to read challenging (Adams, 1990). This makes guided reading's goal—to help all readers achieve grade level independent reading—face challenges in catching up. Read the research on this point—it's both extensive and unequivocal (Lentz, 1998; Neuman and Dickinson, 2001; Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998; Torgesen, 1998; Whitehurst and Lonigan, 2001). As Juel first noted in 1988, a child who struggles to read in the first grade is 88 percent more likely to struggle in the fourth grade as well.

Clearly, the early prevention of reading difficulties is critical (Clay, 1993; Richardson, 2018; Slavin, Madden, Dolan, and Wasik, 1996) and, to that end, there is no more effective way to prevent falling behind than guided reading. All students—those who are challenged, those who thrive as capable readers, and those for whom English is a target language—benefit from guided reading's unique double scaffolding: 1) "just-right texts," thoughtfully matched to each student to provide both instructional support and challenge; and 2) scaffolded instruction. Guided reading offers the surest route to critical thinking, deep comprehension, and confident, capable independent reading.

Close Reading and Text-Based Evidence

Reading comprehension is complex and can be taught only through the effective processing—with deep thinking—of connected and coherent texts. The RAND (2002) definition of reading helps frame the work of guided reading:

> *Reading comprehension [is] the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. It consists of three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading.*

Reading is an active, complex, and multidimensional process that serves many different purposes. Readers are problem solvers, solving new words and navigating literary elements in fiction and text structures in informational texts, while constantly monitoring their hold on meaning. The moment meaning slips away, a red flag should go up, and readers should stop and rethink until they are reassured they are back on the meaning track, using the text as their comprehension anchor. If their dip back into the text doesn't yield meaningful language and understanding, they need to revisit again and again until it does.

An Exemplary Teaching-Assessing Loop

Intentional and intensive instruction, informed by continuous formative assessment, characterizes the daily routine of the thoughtful guided reading teacher (Richardson and Walther, 2013). The teacher continuously monitors students' progress: Are they mastering the foundational skills of reading? Are they learning to control the powerful linguistic and cognitive strategies that enable mature, skillful, independent reading? Teachers recognize that academic growth occurs across time, developmental benchmarks, and disciplines. But working with finely honed instruction and expertly selected texts gives them the best shot at maximizing the instructional leverage of each text.

Closing Thoughts

Guided reading is not an exercise to practice reading skills. It is research-based differentiated reading instruction that propels all students toward confident, independent reading. It's our best guarantee that our students will hit their reading stride and read many diverse, high-quality grade-level fiction books and informational texts—on their way to creating a rich, literate lives for themselves. Reading well means reading with deep, refined comprehension. We want our students to gain maximum insight, knowledge, and enjoyment from every text they read—nothing less will do.

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TEXT SETS

"Text sets are a tool for creating a lifelong habit of mind."

—Maria Nichols, director of school innovation, San Diego Unified School District

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Text sets are an instructional technique that's simple to implement and almost unfailingly effective—fulfilling many of the instructional shifts called for by rigorous reading standards, including increasing practice with both nonfiction and fiction reading, engaging in close reading, accessing domain-specific vocabulary, and addressing text-dependent questions with text-based evidence.

➤ Text sets are a collection of sources of information that have a commonality. They explore a shared topic, issue, or big idea." Text sets invite children to explore, discuss, and pursue additional questions (Scharer et al., 2018; Nichols, 2009).

➤ According to Neuman and Roskos (2012), text sets work best as an instructional tool when they are "coherent, narrowly focused on a set of key ideas to ensure that children will have repeated opportunities to hear and develop an understanding of a common set of words and concepts throughout the readings."

➤ Students are on their way to becoming critically aware, and insightful learners and thinkers as they wrestle with different concepts, ideas, perspectives, and opinions across a range of texts and learn to construct their own beliefs drawing from multiple sources of information—as opposed to simply believing a single source. (Robb, 2003).

More to Know: Intertextual Connections

The relation that each text has to the texts surrounding it is often known as *intertextuality*. Readers build understanding as they draw information from a range of texts. Reading multiple texts across the same theme, topic, genre, or issue automatically fosters close reading and deepens and refines subject knowledge. As noted by literacy researcher Peter Johnston, "To understand a text deeply, we need multiple perspectives. To understand a subject, idea, or concept more deeply, we need multiple texts because each text offers another author's perspective on the subject" (2009).

As readers finish one book in the set, they are better prepared for reading and understanding the next book in the set. Each book builds on the last. Plus, when students read across a set of related books, they inevitably notice the similarities and differences in how texts are crafted. Subtle differences across texts that might have escaped a student's notice if he or she approached each book as a singular read—including text structure and features, vocabulary, and presentational formats—come into sharp focus as students concentrate on reading and discussing a set of related texts (Fountas and Pinnell, 2006, 2017).

What Text Sets Help Students Accomplish

Our students thrive when they read a diverse range of classic and contemporary literature, as well as engaging nonfiction on a range of topics. In this way they build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities, and broaden their understanding.

Learn Critical Content

Extensive nonfiction reading may well be the key to success in later schooling. As students advance in grade level, they more frequently face content-area textbooks as well as informational passages on tests. Including more informational texts in early schooling prepares them for these reading and writing demands. Students who know something about the topics they meet in different academic subjects bring a great advantage to their reading and writing. The more specialized academic knowledge they have, the easier it is to comprehend and convey new information when they read and write (Hampton and Resnick, 2008).

Furthermore, "students are expected to learn from increasingly technical expository texts during adolescence, and their knowledge base must continue to grow in order to meet the demands of this text … students who do not keep pace with the increasing demands content area texts place on prior knowledge will fall further and further behind in their ability to construct the meaning of the text" (Torgesen et al., 2007). Text sets, related by theme, provide unique conceptual and linguistic support and enable even challenged readers to access critical content.

Build Academic and Domain-Specific Vocabulary to Access Content

"Domain-specific academic vocabulary consists of relatively low-frequency, content-specific words that appear in textbooks and other instructional materials; for example, *apex* in math, *escarpment* in geography, and *isobar* in science" (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2011). Knowing that a robust vocabulary predicts reading comprehension, it is essential that we do all that we can to help our students grow their understanding of vocabulary related to specific domains of content. As children's vocabulary grows, it bolsters their reading comprehension (Duke and Carlisle, 2011). Duke cites the high correlation (0.86) between academic vocabulary and comprehension and offers several strategies that students can use again and again to lock down the meaning of more sophisticated content words, including relating words to themes and to other similar words. These word associations help build networks of meaning that support reading comprehension. Of course, within thematic text sets, vocabulary is automatically related. Students encounter the same set of thematically related words across each text set, enabling them to more easily absorb and assimilate the new words.

Approach Complex Texts

To grow and achieve the goals of higher reading standards, our students must read extensively and intensively—especially authentic literature that offers them new language, new knowledge, and new modes of thought. Close reading—which text sets promote—is a key strategy. Kylene Beers and Bob Probst (2013) explain close reading:

> *Close reading should suggest close attention to the text; close attention to the relevant experience, thought, and memory of the reader; close attention to the responses and interpretations of other readers; and close attention to the interactions among those elements.*

A close reading is also a careful and purposeful rereading of a text. It's an encounter with the text where students are able to focus on what the author had to say, what the author's purpose was, what the words mean, and what the structure of the text tells them. We provide text-dependent questions—and encourage our students to reread with their own questions in mind—which require our students to return to the text and search for answers. These aren't the old-fashioned recall questions in which students simply search for the facts. These are questions that prompt students to consider the text and the author's purpose, as well as the structure, graphics, flow of the text, and the reader's own response to it (Beers and Probst, 2013, 2017; Fisher, Frey, and Lapp, 2012; Lehman, 2013; Robb, 2013).

Closing Thoughts

Carol Jago (2011) reminds us that "curriculum should be aimed at what Lev Vygotsky calls students' zone of proximal development." Vygotsky (1979) wrote, "The only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it." To that end, Jago suggests that classroom texts should "pose intellectual challenges for readers and invite them to stretch and grow." Rich and thought-provoking thematically related text sets that stimulate student interest and motivation help students become stronger readers and stronger learners. As they engage in a close read across related texts, students build their skill as proficient readers—and acquire fascinating information about the world around them (Cappiello and Dawes, 2013). Plus, when texts offer a wide range of points of view, students are forced to grapple with possible conflicting and questionable information—exactly the kind of deep critical thinking encouraged by today's standards.

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BOOK CLUBS

"Reading ought to change us in some way. It ought to teach us more about ourselves, others, or the world around us."

—Dr. Kylene Beers and Dr. Robert Probst, literacy educators and authors

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KEY FINDINGS

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➤ Unique teaching and learning potency arises from a magical alchemy of conversation about books—or shared text talk—as students and teachers come together in collaborative, heterogeneously grouped book clubs to discuss and engage with the books on multiple levels (Sharer, 2018; Serafini, 2011).

➤ Through reflective, academic conversation about books, teachers and students create the vibrant, literate classroom community that best supports high-level, quality comprehension (Sharer, 2018; Fountas and Pinnell, 2017).

➤ The collaborative, interactive nature of the club enables all students—including reluctant readers and English language learners—to find the support they need to fully engage with the books (Sharer, 2018; Fountas and Pinnell, 2017).

➤ Each club member gains access to more expansive, deeper comprehension as he or she participates in an intricate network of meaning-construction through shared talk about books (Sharer, 2018; Fountas and Pinnell, 2017).

➤ The productive structure of book clubs (also known as "literature circles") can be reshaped as "inquiry circles" to support independent student reading and research. "Learners must have opportunities to respond to their reading every day by talking, writing, and drawing about their thinking," write Harvey and Daniels (2009). Book clubs and inquiry circles "demand that kids talk to each other, jot down their thinking, and record information as they collaborate in the pursuit of answers to their questions" (Harvey and Daniels, 2009).

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- ➤ Kylene Beers and Robert E. Probst (2017) remind us that the fundamental reason for reading is to learn, grow, and change. As they note:
  - If a changemaker—as a person—is one who inspires, who offers creative solutions to social problems, who mentors, who collaborates—then we see no reason why texts should not be viewed as changemakers. They can be viewed as changemakers if we recognize that we read for a far more critical reason than to be able to answer someone else's questions; we read to raise our own questions. We read to explore, to wonder, to grow, to become what we did not even know we might want to be. We read to change.
- ➤ The authors encourage us to be open to reading for new information—information that gives us pause and prompts us to reconsider old ways of thinking and doing things.
- ➤ The questions we ask of our students should be the questions we ask of ourselves when we read:
  - What surprised me?
  - What did the author think I already know?
  - What changed, challenged, or confirmed my thinking?
- ➤ These are the kinds of open-ended questions that drive thinking, learning, and change.

More to Know: A Grand Conversation

An easy way to understand the lively, shared conversation we want to promote in a student book club is to consider the rush of conversation that often follows an intense or provocative film you see with friends. As you walk out of the movie theater, each member of the group noting the film's memorable moments, you are collectively swept up in the thrill of intellectual analysis—connecting your experience with the film to other films you may have seen, analyzing the film's deeper meaning, expressing new insights, and all the while, energetically building on, extending, and refining each other's thoughts as you cite moments from the film to support your opinions. The invigorating conversation feels urgent and profound as you craft together an understanding of the experience you just shared in the darkened theater: What did it mean? How might it forever change your understanding of the world?

This after-the-movie "grand conversation" (Eeds and Peterson, 2007) mirrors what we want to happen in our book clubs, also known as literature study, literature circles, or literature discussion groups. We think of the book club as a literature "investigation" where participants "try out tentative ideas, search for information to confirm or refute their thinking, and build on one another's ideas" (Eeds and Peterson, 2007).

And just as in the grand conversations we share after a terrific movie, there's no one right answer in a book club. Students participating in book clubs enjoy wide-ranging conversation (although the talk is always focused on and grounded in the text) and ask questions of each other, as they probe deeper or work to clarify shared ideas and thoughts about the text.

Unlike the "comprehension check" in old basal reading groups where the teacher asks a series of questions each linked to one right answer to ascertain whether her students understood the text, all participants in a book club, including the teacher, ask authentic questions of each other. They work collaboratively to understand one another's response to the book. The questions they ask are genuine attempts to build meaning and not intended to check up on comprehension. As Eeds and Peterson remind us (2007), it's the difference between a "gentle inquisition" and a "grand conversation." We want our students to enjoy a grand conversation about every book they read, and as we listen in on their lively book talk, we easily learn what they understood about the book and where they might need instructional support.

The Teacher's Role

The teacher's role in a book club is key. You demonstrate the stance and language of literary analysis. What does it look like and sound like to engage in an analytical discussion about a book, fiction or nonfiction? What language do you use? How do you draw on evidence from the book to support your position? Students will learn as you prompt and model, not only in their book clubs, but also throughout the day, as you create a rich analytical classroom culture and model during your interactive read-aloud and in your guided reading groups. You'll demonstrate the components of literary analysis: plot, characters, setting, theme, style and language, mood, point of view, illustrations, and symbols. You'll also model the features of nonfiction analysis such as organization, style, tone, illustrations/graphics, accuracy, and mood, asking your students such questions as: "What do you notice about the language the author uses and the perspectives he or she assumes?" You prompt, model, and continually monitor the discussion. What do your students understand? Where do they need more support?

Choosing the Right Book

Choosing the right book is pivotal. "Book clubs that engage students in inquiry start with a good book selection" (Fountas and Pinnell, 2006). Effective book study groups center around books that are developmentally appropriate for students, as well as books that students love to read. It's also important to choose books that are substantive and reflect layers of meaning that provoke talk.

There are multiple ways to organize book clubs (Marinak and Gambrell, 2016). Some teachers find that it works best to organize the books as "text sets" around themes, topics, and genres. In this way, each student in the group might read a different book in the text set and then, when they gather in their book club to discuss, they build connections within in the text set as they compare and contrast the individual titles. Educators can create a text set drawing from a wide range of criteria:

- Author study exploring multiple titles all written by the same author
- Genre study reading across a particular genre such as mystery, biography, or historical fiction
- Characters investigating similar characters across books such as a strong female protagonist
- Text structure analyzing similar literary elements such as flashbacks or stories within stories

Middle School and Book Clubs: A Perfect Match

Early adolescence and the shift to middle school represent a significant milestone for most students. In addition to encountering more demanding literacy challenges across the disciplines, middle school students experience a complex relationship with reading and writing as they wrestle with their own self-identity. Adolescents crave social connection and autonomy, and book clubs—framed around independent reading, small-group decision-making, and collaborative conversations—are uniquely suited to address both needs.

- Book clubs foster student choice and provide middle schoolers with lots of opportunities to make decisions, take responsibility for reading their books on time, and come to the book club prepared to talk about the text. This bolsters self-confidence, sparks engagement, and builds communities around books (Haas, 2013; Guthrie, 2008).
- Engagement is the life force of adolescent literacy learning. Adolescents who see value in school reading will read and enjoy academic success. And those who don't will read much less and typically fall behind. Reading disengagement is more often than not the root cause of school failure and dropouts (Guthrie, 2008).

- Book clubs help young teens discover themselves as readers with unique reading preferences and needs. Middle schoolers "refine their reading preferences, become sophisticated readers of informational text, and lay the groundwork for a lifelong reading habit. They begin to use reading to help answer profound questions about themselves and the world. With good instruction, ample time, and opportunity to read a variety of texts, young adolescents can become successful readers both in and out of school." (IRA, 2013).

- Book clubs offer adolescents, known for their divergent learning styles, extended learning opportunities to shape and share their learning in unique and creative ways. Tweens can draw from the language arts (oral and written presentations), technology, and the visual and dramatic arts (Wilhelm, 2012).

Closing Thoughts

The great joy of a book club is the opportunity it affords to share fast-paced, stimulating conversation about a title that others have read and enjoyed (or not!). Inviting your students to participate in lively, dynamic book clubs is a surefire way to hook them as lifelong readers who know how to crack open texts to relish the riches: exquisite literary language, intriguing ideas, fascinating, content-rich information—all the myriad pleasures that make books such remarkable companions (Short, 1986; Eeds and Peterson, 2007; Harvey and Daniels, 2009; Hill, Noe, Johnson, 2001).

Language educator Frank Serafini reminds us of the outstanding intellectual benefits of interactive classroom discussions: Students, not teachers, assume these essential responsibilities:

- Articulating their own ideas and interpretations about their reading.

- Listening actively to other students' ideas.

- Opening lines of communication and negotiating meanings by responding directly to other students' understandings and interpretations.

- Trying to understand what other students are saying.

- Asking questions when ideas or concepts are unclear.

- Remaining open to new ideas and opinions

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READING AND WRITING CONNECTIONS

I still hold that the greatest joy of being a writer is that
I can read all I want to and call it work.

—Katherine Paterson, national ambassador for Young People's Literature, 2010-2011

KEY FINDINGS

- ➤ Reading and writing are mutually supportive language processes; they are interdependent processes that are essential to each other and mutually beneficial (Cunningham and Zilbusky, 2014; Pinnell and Fountas, 2011; Holt and Vacca, 1984).

- ➤ Writing about reading makes comprehension visible; it also helps readers frame and focus their understanding (Serravallo, 2012, 2013; Graham and Perin, 2007; Graham and Hebert, 2010). Asking students to write about their reading may provide the best window into their reading process and comprehension (Serravallo, 2012, 2013; Roessing, 2009).

- ➤ Reading and writing are complex developmental language processes involving the orchestration and integration of a wide range of understandings, strategies, skills, and attitudes. Both processes develop as a natural extension of children's need to communicate and make sense of their varied experiences (Pinnell and Fountas, 2011).

- ➤ Beginning readers and writers learn to use many sources of information including memory, experience, pictures, and their knowledge of language—purpose, structure, and sound/symbol relationships (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, and Moses, 2005). Literacy emerges when children draw and label pictures, and create, act out, or retell stories. During these times they are engaged in literate behaviors that are essential aspects of the language development process (Teale and Sulzby, 1986).

- ➤ Young writers come to understand the responsibilities of an author and learn to follow the rules of conventional writing. All young writers eventually learn to write with their potential readers in mind. (Bennett-Armistead, 2005; Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2013).

➤ Every time we enter a text as a reader, we receive a writing lesson: how to spell, punctuate, use proper grammar, structure a sentence or paragraph, and organize a text. We also learn the many purposes that writing serves and the different genres and formats it assumes to serve these varied purposes (Duke et al., 2013; Culham, 2014, 2012; Paterson, 2014; Hansen, 2014; Smith, 1988).

➤ "Whether it was traditional or nontraditional forms of writing, the use of multimodal texts help[s] to shape and possibly expand [young girl's] views of themselves and their writings" (Muhammad and Womack, 2015)

More to Know: Writing into Understanding

Again, what seems to distinguish students who succeed from those who don't is the ability to engage independently in a close analysis of demanding texts—and there may be no better way to accomplish that goal than through writing (Graham and Hebert, 2010). Two of the most comprehensive reading-writing research studies are meta-analyses: Graham and Perin (2007) and Graham and Hebert (2010). Both reveal that writing has a strong and consistently positive impact on reading comprehension. The authors explain:

> *Transforming a mental summary of text into writing requires additional thought about the essence of the material, and the permanence of writing creates an external record of this synopsis that can be readily critiqued.*

The benefits of writing about texts are both abundant and profound—and mirror the kind of thinking we want our students to do when they are reading (Graham and Perin, 2007; Graham and Hebert, 2010):

- Engage in deep thinking about ideas
- Draw on their own knowledge and experience
- Consolidate and review information
- Reformulate thinking
- Organize and integrate ideas
- Be explicit about text evidence
- Be reflective
- Note personal involvement
- Capture the reading experience in their own words

Researchers and educators alike note the mutual benefits of pairing reading with writing and vice versa:

> *Having students write about a text should enhance reading comprehension because it affords greater opportunities to think about ideas in a text, requires them to organize and integrate those ideas into a coherent whole, fosters explicitness, facilitates reflection, encourages personal involvement with texts, and involves students in transforming ideas into their own words. In short, writing about a text should enhance comprehension because it provides students with a tool for visibly and permanently recording, connecting, analyzing, personalizing, and manipulating key ideas in text* (Graham and Hebert, 2010).

> *Writing helps students better understand what they read by engaging them actively in practicing comprehension. Students must understand what they are reading to present their ideas about texts effectively in writing. This requires students to go back to the text, reread, and clarify misunderstandings. Again, writing about texts pushes students to practice the habits of effective reading* (Hampton and Resnick, 2008).

> *Setting up time for students to talk and write about what they are thinking is one way to move students forward as people who think independently about what they are reading … People who share what they wonder about, what they notice, and what they are thinking in a variety of ways* (Czekanski, 2012).

Writing makes reading comprehension visible and that, Australian researcher John Hattie (2008) reminds us, is the heart of effective teaching. When we can see what our students know and what they need to know, we can create clear goals for each student and provide the targeted feedback they need to surge forward:

> *Teachers need to know the learning intentions and success criteria of their lessons, know how well they are attaining these criteria for all students, and know where to go next in light of the gap between students' current knowledge and understanding and the success criteria of: "Where are you going?," "How are you going?," and "Where to next?"*

Reading Like a Writer

And then, too, there's the teaching power of reading; we learn to write, spell, and punctuate, and structure a sentence, a paragraph, and a text through voluminous reading (Krashen, 2011). It's not a coincidence that so many published writers point to the voluminous reading they did as children as both their inspiration and their instruction for their own exemplary writing. Listen to author Lola Schaefer in Culham (2014) explain:

> I'm not sure which comes first, the reading or the writing. Early on in my career, the reading had the strongest impact. I immersed myself in children's books—both classics and the newer titles. I passionately studied them for pacing, vocabulary, cadence, humor, voice, leads, use of figurative language, and endings. I learn so much from reading like a writer, and still do.

Closing Thoughts

Reading and writing are mutually supportive language processes. Separating them makes about as much sense as separating talking and listening. Fortunately, our more rigorous new standards call for the integration of the language arts, challenging us to find ways to invite our students to benefit from the full power of language: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Ruth Culham (2014), a former children's librarian who has long advocated the use of mentor texts to teach writing, reminds us, "Just think of what reading brings into the writer's life. With mentor texts and a good teacher guiding them, student writers can learn the following:

- Where ideas come from and how they play out
- How an idea develops and moves seamlessly from beginning to end
- How the writer casts a spell over the reader that lasts long after the last page is turned
- How words and phrases are used to create deep meaning and understanding
- How sentences sound and flow to serve to underscore the importance of different elements of the idea
- How conventions are used to help the reader navigate the text
- How the physical appearance of the writing is an open invitation to reading."

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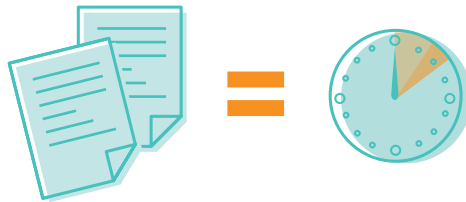Smith, F. (1988). "Reading Like a Writer." *Joining the Literacy Club.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Did you know?

• • •

38% of fourth-graders read **10 pages of text** or less at school or for homework, which equals about **8-12 minutes of daily reading**.

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"
The family seems to be the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child's development. Without family involvement, intervention is likely to be unsuccessful, and what few effects are achieved are likely to disappear once the intervention is discontinued.

—Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner, Harvard Family Research

Chapter 6
FAMILY LITERACY

- ❯ Oral Language—The Foundation of Literacy

- ❯ The Power of Speaking Two (or More) Languages

- ❯ Home Reading Culture

- ❯ The Read-Aloud Plus Text Talk Maximizes Learning

ORAL LANGUAGE— THE FOUNDATION OF LITERACY

"Hug your children by surrounding them with love and language. Talk is the road that leads to reading and changes lives."

—Dr. Adria Klein, professor emerita of education, California State University, San Bernardino

KEY FINDINGS

➤ Oral language development precedes literacy and parallels it. Both oral and written language are developmental language processes that are mutually supportive and develop over time (Scharer et al., 2017; Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014; Pinnell and Fountas, 2011).

➤ The interactive strategies that parents use, particularly the quality of their language that they share with their children and the books they read aloud, are strongly related with their children's language development (Hart and Risley, 2003; Landry and Smith, 2006).

➤ The interactive read-aloud (reading aloud plus conversation about the book), also known as dialogic reading, is a particularly potent early language experience for young children (Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014; Bennett-Armistead, Duke, and Moses, 2005; Pinnell and Fountas, 2011).

➤ The understandings about reading that young children acquire through oral language include the following (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998; Klein, 2014):

- Basic language components that both oral and written language share in common such as lexical, syntactic, and interpretive processes
- Cognitive mechanisms such as working memory
- Conceptual memory such as vocabulary and topic knowledge

More to Know: The Scientist in the Crib

Language development begins well before infants begin making their first words. In their widely read book, *The Scientist in the Crib* (1999), Gopnick, Meltzoff, and Kuhl maintain that processing speech sounds begins in early infancy. Infants quickly become language-specific listeners—by four months they pay attention only to sounds heard in the language to which they have been exposed.

Infants make sounds that imitate the tones and rhythms of adult talk. They "read" gestures and facial expressions and begin to associate words and meanings. At birth, even before they speak or understand language, infants begin processing the speech stream around them in order to determine the sounds of the language (phonology), and the form and structure of the language (syntax).

By the time they are 12 months old, they will have "cracked the code" for many of these properties as they prepare to produce their first spoken words. Here they will show they are mapping what they know about the form of language to what language means (semantics). Over the first 12 months, the infant is conducting many different analyses of the speech stream, working on all the dimensions of language at once—phonology, syntax, and semantics (Lust, 2006).

By the time children are about three years old, they will have mastered much of the basic system of the language around them (Lust, 2006).

Learning to Use Language

Parents differ in the amount of structure they use; for example, as children grow and develop into the preschool years, many parents pull back from repeating and extending their child's language. They also ease up on directives and invite the child to take the lead. The impact of directness varies across ages. In the early toddler period, higher degrees can support language skills, but by preschool, it begins to interfere. Though it's important to maintain a "moderate level" of linguistic challenge, it's also essential to let the child take the initiative with language and not be overly directive (Landry and Smith, 2011).

We can observe children's literacy development through their use of literacy materials. After babies can purposefully grasp and manipulate objects, board books become a part of their exploration. Infants between eight and 12 months who are read to regularly progress from mouthing books to playing with the covers to turning pages. This book handling is usually accompanied by babbling, which reflects an adult's vocalizations during reading (Pinnell, 2018; Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory).

As children continue to develop as language users, they learn the grammatical structure of their language, expand their vocabulary, and gain metalinguistic skills. Metalinguistic skills involve not only the ability to use language but also the ability to think about it, play with it,

analyze it, talk about it, and make judgments about correct forms (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998; Bennett-Armistead, Duke, and Moses, 2005; Hailey, 2014; Klein, 2014).

Young children also use their language in connection with everyday literacy events, such as (with their parents' help) searching for and clipping coupons, sorting the mail, checking the TV guide for favorite shows, or following a recipe to make dinner—providing an opportunity for researchers and caregivers to observe their ideas about literacy. In these ways, children learn how to "connect life with literacy" (Pinnell, 2018; Morrow, 2008; Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2013).

Questioning the 30-Million-Word Gap

In order to develop a robust vocabulary and extensive conceptual knowledge, children need rich language input that enables them to understand what objects are called and how they work or go together. Hart and Risely (1999) conducted a longitudinal research study that examined parents' talk to children among families from varying socioeconomic levels—identified as welfare, working class, and professional families—and discovered dramatic differences among the richness of words children from lower socioeconomic levels heard compared to their peers from middle or more affluent levels.

Hart and Risley suggested that children from the wealthiest families heard 1,500-plus more words each hour, on average, than children from economically challenged families (616 vs. 2,153 words each hour). Ultimately, children who are immersed in rich language may hear 30 million more words by the time they enter school than children who don't have the same opportunities. What's more, children from more affluent households are more likely to hear encouraging language used to accentuate the positive and support, rather than discouraging language used to reprimand and criticize. And these essential differences are reflected in the scores of the tests administered to the same children when they are nine and 10 years old.

In recent years, the Hart-Risely study has come under criticism:

> *Amid growing controversy about the oft-cited "30-million-word gap," this investigation uses language data from five American communities across the socioeconomic spectrum to test, for the first time, Hart and Risley's (1995) claim that poor children hear 30 million fewer words than their middle-class counterparts during the early years of life. The five studies combined ethnographic fieldwork with longitudinal home observations of 42 children (18–48 months) interacting with family members in everyday life contexts. Results do not support Hart and Risley's claim, reveal substantial variation in vocabulary environments within each socioeconomic stratum, and suggest that definitions of verbal environments that exclude multiple caregivers and bystander talk disproportionately underestimate the number of words to which low-income children are exposed.*

We want to avoid making assumptions about children's language or literacy level based simply on their families' professional, educational, or economic status. Children arrive at

school with a wide variety of experiences. The goal of an educator is to get to know each child as a unique learner and work with the family to promote language and literacy both at home and at school.

Fostering Oral Language

Immerse children in rich language—both oral and written—beginning at birth. We need to speak directly to our young children every day; researchers suggest that for optimal development, infants and toddlers should hear 30,000 words per day.

Children learn not only from language that you address to them, but also from language they overhear around them (Au et al., 2002). Linguistic interaction has additional positive effects on linguistic development (Pinnell, 2018).

Although exposure to language is essential, explicit "drilling" is not needed for the normally developing child. Parents don't so much "teach" the child, as the child discovers and builds language. Children are "spontaneous apprentices" (Miller, 1976); they latch themselves to their caregivers and learn from their every move, including absorbing the almost innumerable ways in which adults use language, both oral and written (Klein, 2014).

Read to children, encourage them to ask questions and to talk about what is read, and surround them with language through literacy. Reading aloud to children is tremendously important but reading and discussing the reading is even more potent and beneficial (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Laminack, 2016; Pinnell, 2018; Allyn and Morrell, 2016).

Closing Thoughts

David Dickinsen and Patton Tabors (2002) address the three dimensions of oral language experience linked to later literacy success:

Exposure to varied vocabulary. Knowing the "right word" is vital if one is to communicate information clearly. We have long known that large vocabularies are instrumental to reading success. A robust vocabulary also signals that children are building the content knowledge about the world that is so critical to later reading (Neuman, 2001; Hiebert, 2019; Scharer, 2018).

Opportunities to be part of conversations that use **extended discourse**. Extended discourse is talk that requires participants to develop understandings beyond the here and now and that requires the speaker to use multiple sentences to build a linguistic structure, such as in explanations, narratives, or pretend talk.

Home and classroom environments that are cognitively and linguistically stimulating. Children are most likely to experience conversations that include comprehensible and interesting extended discourse and are rich with vocabulary when their parents are able to obtain and read good books—and when their teachers provide classrooms with a curriculum that is varied and stimulating.

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SPEAKING TWO (OR MORE) LANGUAGES IS BETTER THAN ONE

"Language does not need to be only accepted. It needs to be explored, expanded, and celebrated."

—Dr. Alma Flor Ada, professor emerita, University of San Francisco

KEY FINDINGS

> One of the greatest feats of human development is language learning. Children are well equipped, beginning at birth, to accomplish the complex task of learning language (Lust, 2006).

> The benefits of growing up bilingual or multilingual are many, including a better working memory, enhanced executive function, ability to switch easily from task to task, and to persist in a challenging task. As Linda Espinosa (2013) states, "All children appear to benefit cognitively, linguistically, culturally, and economically from learning more than one language."

> Learning a second language does not cause language confusion, language delay, or cognitive deficit, which have been concerns in the past. In fact, according to studies at the Cornell Language Acquisition Lab (CLAL), children who learn a second language can maintain attention in spite of outside stimuli better than children who know only one language (Lust, 2006).

> Children will learn two languages best if they know that both languages are important and valued. Children also need to have lots of fun and meaningful opportunities to talk, read, and pretend-write in both languages (Freeman and Freeman et al., 2016). Learning a second language also means learning a second culture and new ways of being.

More to Know: Linguistic Geniuses

Young children are very good at learning more than one language—and not only can they learn multiple languages, they can learn when to speak and write each language and to whom. The earlier they learn the second or third or fourth language, the more likely they are to achieve native-like proficiency.

Still, the National Association for the Education of Young Children suggests that reading and writing instruction is best implemented, whenever possible, in a student's home language:

> *For children whose primary language is other than English, studies have shown that a strong basis in a first language promotes school achievement in a second language (Cummins, 1979). Children who are learning English as a second language are more likely to become readers and writers of English when they are already familiar with the vocabulary and concepts in their primary language. In this respect, oral and written language experiences should be regarded as an additive process, ensuring that children are able to maintain their home language while also learning to speak and read English (Wong Fillmore, 1991). Including non-English materials and resources to the extent possible can help to support children's first language while children acquire oral proficiency in English.*

Spend time with a child who is learning to speak and in no time you'll hear language that surprises and delights with its unique inventiveness, as children invent their way into conventional language. Children do, indeed, say the darnedest things, but what they say is always systematic and rule-governed, and it reflects their brilliant hypotheses about "how language works"—and how they can use it to accomplish what they're trying to do, whether they are learning one language or several.

A sound foundation in the first language—spoken and written—creates the best conditions for the acquisition of a second language. Research demonstrates the importance of literacy in the first language for students' full development of proficiency in the language of instruction, subsequent academic success, and high levels of self-confidence. What's more, academic and linguistic skills transfer to the second language, even when the target language has a dissimilar writing system from the first language (Cummins, 1991; Goldenberg, 2011). For example, children who learned to read and write in Spanish in their Honduran home and school do not have to start from scratch to learn to read in English in their new American school.

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HOME READING CULTURE

"Young children who have access to books in the home and who are read aloud to regularly have the best chance of becoming successful readers."

—Dr. Catherine Snow, professor of education, Harvard University

KEY FINDINGS

> Children raised in homes with more than 500 books spent three years longer in school than children whose parents had only a few books. Growing up in a household with 500 or more books is "as great an advantage as having university-educated rather than unschooled parents, and twice the advantage of having a professional rather than an unskilled father" (Evans, et al., 2010; Miller and Sharp, 2018).

> The results suggest that children whose parents have lots of books are nearly 20 percent more likely to finish college. Indeed, as a predictor of college graduation, books in the home trump even the education of the parents. Even a child who hails from a home with 25 books will, on average, complete two more years of school than would a child from a home without any books at all (Evans, et al., 2010).

> Regardless of how many books the family already has, each addition to a home library helps a child get a little farther in school. But the gains are not equally great across the socioeconomic spectrum; rather, they are larger for families of more modest means. Children from families with less gain more in the first few years of school. Moreover, having books in the home has a greater impact on children from the least educated families, versus children of the university-educated elite (Evans, et al., 2010).

> In general, the books help establish a reading or "scholarly culture" in the home—one that persists from generation to generation within families, largely independent of education and class—creating a "taste for books" and promoting the skills and knowledge that foster both literacy and numeracy and, thus, lead to lifelong academic advantages (Evans et al., 2010; Miller and Sharp, 2018).

> According to the 2013 *Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report*, having parents who serve as "reading role models"—or with many books in the home—has a greater impact on kids' reading frequency than household income.

➤ Building reading into children's schedules and regularly bringing additional books into the home for children positively influences kids' reading frequency (Mapp, Carver and Lander, 2017; Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014).

➤ Children spend the vast majority of their time outside of school. Children who don't read outside of school are far less likely to become proficient readers (Scharer, 2018, Harvey and Ward, 2017; Allyn and Morrell, 2016; Allington, 2012).

➤ Shirley Brice Heath (1983) noted that all it takes for a child to become a reader is time spent with one joyfully literate person. In other words, when children have access to books and are able to share them with reading mentors who love books and reading, those children are more likely to thrive as readers.

More to Know: The Presence of Books and Reading Role Models

A study titled "Family Scholarly Culture and Educational Success: Books and Schooling in 27 Nations," published in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, produced the astonishing claim that just the mere presence of books profoundly influences a child's academic achievement. Conducted over 20 years, the research by Evans, Kelley, Sikorac, and Treimand (2010) surveyed more than 70,000 people across 27 countries.

The authors report that their reading culture theory, backed by evidence, leads to the following predictions:

• Parents' participation in reading culture—which provides skills and knowledge—will enhance children's educational attainment in all societies, regardless of the parents' formal education and social class.

• An increase in reading culture has the greatest impact on children from families with little reading culture to begin with. For families with less, where books are rare, each additional book matters the most: each additional book yields more "bang for your book" among the book-poor than among the book-rich.

• A reading culture in the home matters more if parents are poorly educated, but matters less if parents are well educated. In other words, the greatest impact of book access occurs among the least educated and poorest families.

A note of caution: The authors write, "Our results do not in any way imply that formal schooling cannot compensate for the absence of scholarly culture in the home; but the results do highlight the fact that children from homes lacking in scholarly culture may require special attention."

Charles Bayless (2010) speaks also of a "reading culture" that develops in homes when children are able to read and enjoy their own books in their own environment:

> *For the majority of young people, enthusiastic and habitual reading is the single most predictive personal habit [leading to] desirable life outcomes. Enthusiastic and habitual reading is primarily a function of the family environment and culture, and it is most effectively inculcated in the earliest years (0–6) but can be accomplished at any age. Creating a reading culture can be achieved objectively and through a series of specific behaviors and activities undertaken by parents—but it requires access to books, time, persistence, and consistency.*

Of course, in today's digital world, parents are facing new challenges as they work to inspire a love of reading in their children. According to the *Scholastic Kids and Family Reading* Report, nearly half of parents say that their children do not spend enough time reading for fun and spends too much time on social network sites or playing video games. Parents' concerns have increased since 2010 for children across all age groups (2013).

Closing Thoughts

The PIRLS researchers found a positive relationship between students' reading achievement in the fourth grade and parents having engaged their children in early literacy activities before starting school (e.g., reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys, and playing word games).

- The presence of children's books in the home also continued to show a strong positive relationship with reading achievement. The average reading achievement difference between students from homes with many children's books (more than 100) and those from homes with few children's books (10 or fewer) was very large (91 points, almost one standard deviation). On average across countries, there was a slight decrease in parents' reports of the number of children's books in the home, perhaps reflecting increased access to internet-based literacy media.

- In PIRLS 2006, on average across countries, 37 percent of the fourth-grade students had parents who read more than five hours a week: 43 percent for one to five hours, and 20 percent for less than one hour a week. Not surprisingly, reading achievement was highest for students whose parents had favorable attitudes toward reading.

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THE READ-ALOUD AND READING ROLE MODELS BOOST LEARNING

"Reading aloud with children is known to be the single most important activity for building the knowledge and skills they will eventually require for learning to read."

—Dr. Marilyn Adams, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print*

KEY FINDINGS

➤ The American Academy of Pediatricians (AAP) recommends that pediatricians encourage parents to read aloud daily, beginning as early as six months of age (2014). Dr. Pamela High, lead author of the APP policy explains the aim: "… Those 15-20 minutes spent reading with a child can be the best part of the day. It's a joyful way to build child-parent relationships and set a child on the pathway to developing early literacy skills."

➤ "A joyful relationship to books is part of what it means to be healthy" (Needlman, 2014).

➤ "Having reading role model parents or a large book collection at home has more of an impact on kids' reading frequency than does household income" (*Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report*, 2013; Graeper, 2014; Hailey, 2014).

➤ Lisa Pinkerton (2018) explains the transformative power of the read-aloud: "As students move through experiences with literary texts, they forge links between the literature they experience and their own lives …Walking in the shoes of characters with experiences unlike their own can help to expand students' understandings of what it means to be human, building empathy for others."

➤ Reading aloud increases your child's vocabulary and attention span. Additionally, reading aloud to your child is a commercial for reading. When you read aloud, you're whetting a child's appetite for reading. A child who has been read to will want to learn to read herself. She will want to do what she sees her parents doing. But if a child never sees anyone pick up a book, she isn't going to have that desire (Miller and Sharp, 2018; Laminack, 2016; Trelease, 2013; Massaro, 2016).

➤ "Children who have an enthusiastic reader as a role model may stay determined to learn to read, even when facing challenges, rather than becoming easily discouraged" (Cunningham and Zibulsky, 2014).

➤ The interactive read-aloud results in student gains in vocabulary (Beck and McKeown, 2001), comprehension strategies and story schema (Van den Broek, 2001), and concept development (Scharer, 2018; Wasik and Bond, 2001; Pinnell and Fountas, 2011).

More to Know: Doctor's Orders: Read Aloud Every Day

The American Academy of Pediatrics, which represents 62,000 pediatricians, recommends reading aloud to infants from birth. As a result, our youngest children, from birth to age three, stimulated by daily read-alouds, will enjoy a significant increase in important brain development. The formal recommendation, in part, is meant to enhance young children's vocabulary development and other communication skills. The aim is increase the number of words that children hear before they are able to speak and use the words. According to research, and pediatric development, talking and singing to infants can result in advances in cognition that are recognizable as early as 18 months (Needlman, 2014; Massaro, 2016).

Reading Role Models Make a Difference

We've long believed that the parent-child read-aloud plays a pivotal role in helping youngsters learn to read (Miller and Sharp, 2018; Scharer, 2018; Laminack, 2016; Graeper, 2014; Hailey, 2014). An intergenerational reading study provides the research to back that belief. Indeed, the research demonstrates that not only is the read-aloud effective, the strength of the relation between parent-child reading and outcome measures "is as strong a predictor of reading achievement as is phonemic awareness." *The Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report* (2016) also notes the critical importance of reading relationships and books in the home: "Having reading role-model parents or a large book collection at home has more of an impact on kids' reading frequency than does household income."

The available data on the read-aloud supports intergenerational literacy programs intended to stimulate parent-preschooler reading as an effective way to better prepare young children for beginning reading instruction. Book reading affects acquisition of storybook language—syntax and vocabulary ("once upon a time," for example)—that's unique to the written language used in children's literature (Scharer, 2018; Lever and Sénéchal, 2011; Sénéchal and Young, 2008; Bus, van IJzendoorn, and Pellegrini, 1995).

Children acquire this language as they hear stories read aloud—which eventually aids in reading comprehension. Furthermore, this meta-analysis shows that the effect of book reading is not restricted to children of preschool age. However, the effect seems to become smaller once children become conventional readers and are able to read on their own. The data makes clear that parent-preschooler reading is a necessary preparation for beginning reading instruction at school (Mapp et al., 2017; Bus, van IJzendoorn, and Pellegrini, 1995).

Dominic Massaro (2016) compared the vocabulary that mothers used in conversation with their young children versus the vocabulary that they shared while reading picture books aloud to their children. The results were striking. Massaro found that picture books are two to three times as likely as parent-child conversations (Pinnell, 2018; Hiebert, 2019) to include a word that isn't among the 5,000 most common English words. Indeed, picture books include language that's even more sophisticated than the typical adult conversation. For example, *Pout Pout Fish* by Deborah Diesen features words such as "aghast" and "grimace." And another added bonus: reading to children encourages them to listen. And, as Massaro notes, "Good listeners are going to be good readers."

Closing Thoughts

We can begin to read to babies on the day they are born. Set aside time every day for special reading time. Read aloud to children, and, as they grow, ask them to read aloud to you, or encourage independent reading. Discuss with your children the different materials that you are reading and why, the books you are reading to them, and the books that they are reading on their own. As Jairrels (2009) notes, when children are read three stories a day, by the time they enter first grade, they will have heard more than 6,000 books.

Create a "reading culture" inside the home (Jairrels, 2009): with cozy places to nestle with books, reading routines throughout the day, dinner table discussions about what family members are reading—including all the different print materials that pour into the house every day. Talk with children about their interests, plan trips to the library, and find books that will support and extend what interests your children most. Make books their first go-to resource (Allyn and Morrell, 2016).

As author Emilie Buchwald wisely observed many years ago, "Readers are born on the laps of their parents." Mem Fox (2001) may have said it best of all:

> *The fire of literacy is created by the emotional sparks between a child, a book, and the person reading. It isn't achieved by the book alone, nor by the child alone, nor by the adult who's reading aloud—it's the relationship winding between all three, bringing them together in easy harmony.*

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LIFETIME BENEFITS: THE CASE FOR INDEPENDENT READING

Renowned children's librarian Frances Clark Sayers once famously declared, "I am summoned by books!" Nearly two decades into the 21st century, such a declaration might seem quaint. But it is as potent now as it was when Sayers first uttered the words more than 50 years ago. Although our summons today may arrive via digital reader, the essence of books as a gateway to vibrant language, transcendent content, and dimensions beyond our imaginations remains the same as ever. For that reason, as we consider the skills that our students need to survive and thrive in the 21st century, let us understand that we and our students have no more essential, life-enhancing resource than the book.

The adage "a rising tide lifts all boats" is apt when we consider independent reading. When we read independently, many other literacy skills and understandings rise too. We have decades of research proving that avid readers are almost always skillful readers and strong writers. They know more about the conventions of language such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar because every time we open the pages of a book, we get a lesson on effective writing. Avid readers have robust vocabularies and they know about the world. Reading makes us smart, and reading changes us in ways that expand our understanding and soften our hearts (Beers and Probst, 2017; Krashen, 2011; Sullivan and Brown, 2013; Cunningham and Stanovich, 2001).

Gay Ivey and Peter Johnston (2012) conducted their research inside a high-needs middle school in Virginia that implemented independent reading without any other instruction. The students were mostly reading novels and they were soon hooked, wanting to spend all their time deep inside their books. Their test scores soared. What made the difference? "The kids hadn't been reading, and now they were" (Calkins et al., 2012).

As you've followed your own interests through the research compendium, we hope you'll be inspired as both an educator and parent—or a concerned citizen—to help the children you know.

> I can learn about anything, travel anywhere, ask my own questions, and seek my own answers because I read.

—Donalyn Miller, literacy educator and author

Notes

Notes

SCHOLASTIC PRODUCES EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS TO ASSIST AND INSPIRE STUDENTS • TO CULTIVATE THEIR MINDS TO UTMOST CAPACITY • TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE • TO STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE IN CREATIVE EXPRESSION IN ALL FIELDS OF LEARNING, LITERATURE, AND ART • TO SEEK EFFECTIVE WAYS TO LIVE A SATISFYING LIFE • TO ENLARGE STUDENTS' CONCERN FOR AND UNDERSTANDING OF TODAY'S WORLD • TO HELP BUILD A SOCIETY FREE OF PREJUDICE AND HATE, AND DEDICATED TO THE HIGHEST QUALITY OF LIFE IN COMMUNITY AND NATION • WE STRIVE TO PRESENT THE CLEAREST EXPLANATION OF CURRENT AFFAIRS AND CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT, AND TO ENCOURAGE LITERARY APPRECIATION AND EXPRESSION CONSISTENT WITH THE UNDERSTANDING AND INTERESTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT ALL LEVELS OF LEARNING. • WE BELIEVE IN THE WORTH AND DIGNITY OF EACH INDIVIDUAL • RESPECT FOR THE DIVERSE GROUPS IN OUR MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY • THE RIGHT OF EACH INDIVIDUAL TO LIVE IN A WHOLESOME ENVIRONMENT, AND EQUALLY, THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH INDIVIDUAL TO HELP GAIN AND PRESERVE A DECENT AND HEALTHFUL ENVIRONMENT, BEGINNING WITH INFORMED CARE OF ONE'S OWN BODY AND MIND • HIGH MORAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES • THE DEMOCRATIC WAY OF LIFE, WITH BASIC LIBERTIES — AND RESPONSIBILITIES — FOR EVERYONE • CONSTITUTIONAL, REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT, AND EVEN-HANDED JUSTICE THAT MAINTAINS EQUALITY OF RIGHTS FOR ALL PEOPLE • RESPONSIBLE COMPETITIVE ENTERPRISE AND RESPONSIBLE LABOR, WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL • COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG ALL PEOPLE FOR THE PEACE OF THE WORLD • WE PLEDGE OURSELVES TO UPHOLD THE BASIC FREEDOMS OF ALL INDIVIDUALS • WE ARE UNALTERABLY OPPOSED TO ANY SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT OR SOCIETY THAT DENIES THESE FREEDOMS • WE OPPOSE DISCRIMINATION OF ANY KIND ON THE BASIS OF RACE, CREED, COLOR, SEX, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR IDENTITY, AGE, OR NATIONAL ORIGIN • GOOD CITIZENS MAY HONESTLY DIFFER ON IMPORTANT PUBLIC QUESTIONS. WE BELIEVE THAT ALL SIDES OF THE ISSUES OF OUR TIMES SHOULD BE FAIRLY DISCUSSED — WITH DEEP RESPECT FOR FACTS AND LOGICAL THINKING — IN CLASSROOM MAGAZINES, BOOKS, AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS USED IN SCHOOLS AND HOMES.

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