

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



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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