

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 text, 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.

References

- Allington, R. (2012). *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers. Designing Research-Based Programs*. Boston: Pearson.
- Anderson, Richard C., Wilson P. T., Fielding, L. G. (1988). "Growth in Reading and How Children Spend Their Time Outside of School." *Reading Research Quarterly*, No. 23.
- Atwell, N. and Merkel, A. (2016). *The Reading Zone: How to Help Kids Become Skilled, Passionate, Habitual, Critical Readers, Second Edition*. New York: Scholastic.
- Bayless, C. (2010). "Growing a Reading Culture: Just for Parents." Retrieved from: www.slideshare.net/ThroughtheMagicDoor/growing-a-reading-culture-1647123.
- Beers, K. and Probst, R. (2017). *Disrupting Thinking: Why How We Read Matters*. New York: Scholastic.
- Brenner, D., and Hiebert, E. H. (2010). "The Impact of Professional Development on Students' Opportunity to Read. In E. H. Hiebert and D. Ray Reutzel (Eds.), *Revisiting Silent Reading: New Directions for Teachers and Researchers*. Newark, DE: IRA.
- Brozo, W. Shiel, G., and Topping, K. (2008). "Engagement in Reading: Lessons Learned from Three PISA Countries." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Vol. 51(4).
- Calkins, L., Ehrenworth, M., and Lehman, C. (2012). *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement*. New York: Scholastic.
- Cunningham, A. and Stanovich, K. (1998) "What Reading Does for the Mind." *American Educator*, Vol. 22(1/2).
- Dixon, B. (2015). "Reflections: Love of Books Leads to Academic Success." *In Other Words*. ILA.
- Foorman, B. Schatschneider, C., Eakin, M, Fletcher, J., Moats, L., and Francis, D. (2006). "The Impact of Instructional Practices in Grades 1 and 2 on Reading and Spelling Achievement in High Poverty Schools." *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, Vol. 31(1).
- Guthrie, J. (2004). "Teaching for Literacy Engagement." *Journal of Literacy Research*. Vol. 36(1).
- Guthrie, J. T., Schafer, W. D., and Huang, C. (2001). "Benefits of Opportunity to Read and Balanced Reading Instruction for Reading Achievement and Engagement: A Policy Analysis of State NAEP in Maryland." *Journal of Educational Research*. Vol. 94(3)..
- Harvey, S. and Ward, A. (2017). *From Striving to Thriving: How to Grow Confident, Capable Readers*. New York: Scholastic.
- Hiebert, F. (2019). *The Vocabulary Revolution*. New York: Scholastic.
- Hiebert, F. (2014). *Frank Views on Literacy and the Common Core*. Santa Cruz, CA: The Text Project. Retrieved from: textproject.org/library/books/frank-views-on-literacy-learning-and-the-common-core
- Hiebert, F. (2014). "The Forgotten Reading Proficiency: Stamina in Silent Reading." Santa Cruz, CA: TextProject, Inc.
- Johnston, P. (2011). "RTI in Literacy—Responsive and Comprehensive." *The Elementary School Journal*. Vol. 111(4).
- Kuhn, M. R., and Schwanenflugel, P. J. (2009). "Time, Engagement, and Support: Lessons from a Four-Year Fluency Intervention." In E. H. Hiebert (Ed.), *Reading More, Reading Better*. New York, Guilford Press. 141-160.
- Learned, J., Stockdill, D., and Moje, E. (2011). "Integrating Reading Strategies and Knowledge Building in Adolescent Literacy Instruction" in J. Samuels and A. Farstrup, (Eds.), *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Marzano, R. (2004). *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Miller, D. and Sharp, C. (2018). *Game Changer! Book Access for All Kids*. New York: Scholastic.

References

- Miller, D. and Moss, B. (2013). *No More Independent Reading without Support*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Miller, D. (2009). *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Noguera, P. (2014). "Reading Saved My Life." In L. Bridges (Ed.), *Open a World of Possible: Real Stories About the Joy and Power of Reading*. New York: Scholastic.
- Routman, R. (2014). *Read, Write, Lead. Breakthrough Strategies for Schoolwide Success*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report: Sixth Edition* (2016). Commissioned by Scholastic and conducted by YouGov.
- Shelebine, 2001. "Volume, Academic Vocabulary." New York: Scholastic: Retrieved from: www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/john-shefelbine
- Swan, E., Coddington, C. and Guthrie, J. (2010). "Engaged Silent Reading. Revisiting Silent Reading." In Hiebert, E. and Reutzel, R., (Eds.), *Revisiting Silent Reading: New Directions for Teachers and Researchers*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Taylor, B. M., Frye, B. J., and Maruyama, G. M. (1990). "Time Spent Reading and Reading Growth." *American Educational Research Journal*. Vol. 27(2).