From Striving to Thriving: How to Grow Confident, Capable Readers

Literacy Connection

Facilitated by Annie Ward

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Workshop Component	Key Ideas and Questions	Next Steps
1. Benefits of Voluminous, High-Success Reading • Mining our reading histories • 50+ years of research		
2. Components of Volume • Access • Choice • Time		
3. Expanding RTI • Teaching into volume • Volume-based interventions		

What vivid and voluminous reading experiences do you recall from childhood? Jot and/or sketch them.

Reading Experience	Reflection

Recent Research on Benefits of Engaged Reading

"Books may be the only real magic." –Alice Hoffman

When a child is swept away by a compelling book, s/he is benefiting greatly from the reading experience itself. The right book has important work to do in the heart and mind of reader!

Study #1 Engaged Reading Leads to Heightened, Persistent Neural Connectivity
"Short and Long-Term Effects of a Novel on Connectivity in the Brain"
Gregory S. Berns, Kristina Blaine, Michael J. Prietula, and Brandon Pye
Brain Connectivity
Volume 3, Number 6, 2013
Researchers administered MRI brain scans to a set of college students reading nightly installments of *Pompeii* (historical fiction thriller) and found heightened connectivity in areas of the brain associated with language receptivity and representative understanding. This connectivity was apparent for days after the book was completed. "Reading a novel can transport you into the body of the protagonist"—biologically. Not only are readers imagining themselves in characters' shoes; they are experiencing physiologically the same responses associated with actual bodily sensations. This heightened connectivity yields lasting cognitive benefits.

Study #2 Reading Fiction Builds Empathy
"Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind"
David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano
Science
03 October 2013
After reading literary fiction, people performed better on tests measuring empathy, social perception and emotional intelligence. Literary fiction leaves more to the imagination, causing readers to make inferences about characters and be sensitive to emotional nuance and complexity.

Study #3 Reading Fiction Builds Empathy
"Transportation into a story increases empathy, prosocial behavior, and perceptual bias toward fearful expressions"
Dan R. Johnson
Personality and Individual Differences 52(2)
January 2012
A Washington and Lee psychology professor's study found that the more readers are immersed in the story and the more they are visualizing, the more empathy they feel for the characters and the more likely they are to engage in pro-social behavior as a result. 200 subjects read a five page fictional short story written specifically for the experiment.

Study #4 Reading Fiction improves attitudes towards stigmatized groups
"The greatest magic of Harry Potter: Reducing Prejudice"
Loris Vezzali, Sofia Stathi, Dino Giovannini, Dora Capozza, Elena Trifiletti
Journal of Applied Social Psychology 2015, 45

A team of researchers in Italy met weekly with groups of fifth graders to read and respond to passages from Harry Potter books. At the outset of the study, all children were surveyed about their attitudes towards immigrants and refugees. Children in the treatment groups read passages in which Harry reacted strongly to the persecution of out-groups such as "mudbloods." Meanwhile, children in control groups read passages unrelated to prejudice, such as a description of Harry's first wand purchase. When surveyed again, children in the treatment groups demonstrated significantly warmer feelings toward students from other countries than did children in the control groups.

Study #5 Children's Out-of-School Reading Lives Have Powerful Impact

Wilhelm and Smith—*Reading Unbound* (summarized in 2014 Atlantic article ("The Most Important Lesson Schools Can Teach Kids About Reading: It's Fun") and January 22, 2014 Education Week article "Don't Underestimate the Power of Pleasure Reading"

Wilhelm and Smith studied the out-of-school reading lives of young people. 13 adolescent subjects articulated the myriad benefits they derive from pleasure reading. Wilhelm and Smith also cite the British Cohort Study of 17,000 Brits born in 1970. Pleasure reading had a significant impact on educational attainment and social mobility due to "increased cognitive progress over time." Kids experience "deep fulfilment that we don't completely understand" when they gravitate to books that appeal to them, even when those books are in frowned-upon genres (fantasy, vampire, dystopia).

Study #6 "Engagement with Young Adult Literature: Outcomes and Processes"

Gay Ivey and Peter Johnston

Reading Research Quarterly 48(3)

Researchers replaced core books with classroom libraries and encouraged students to self-select engaging books. Engagement, rather than comprehension checks, anchored the new curriculum. Ivey and Johnston found many statistically significant categories of benefits, including students' reported autonomy, social imaginations, and involvement in the worlds of the books. "Choice and edgy, compelling books, along with time and introductions, commonly led to engagement. Once engaged, students learned that they were able to resist distraction and persist for extended periods, giving them a sense of self-regulation, which they then recognized as a personal competence. Engaged reading led to intense experiences that needed to be discussed immediately." The independent reading initiative also eroded social barriers in this middle school as kids were compelled to talk about their reading with each other. "

EDUCATION

Where Books Are All But Nonexistent

In many high-poverty urban neighborhoods, it's nearly impossible for a poor child to find something to read in the summer.

ALIA WONG JUL 14, 2016

LM OTERO / AP

Forty-five million. That's how many words a typical child in a white-collar family will hear before age 4. The number is striking, not because it's a lot of words for such a small human—the vast majority of a person's neural connections, after all, are formed by age 3—but because of how it stacks up against a poor kid's exposure to vocabulary. By the time she's 4, a child on welfare might only have heard 13 million words.

This disparity is well-documented. It's the subject of myriad news stories and government programs, as well as the Clinton Foundation's "Too Small to Fail" initiative, all of which send the message that low-income parents should talk and read to their children more. But these efforts to close the "word gap" often overlook a fundamental problem. In high-poverty neighborhoods, books—the very

things that could supply so many of those 30 million-plus words—are hard to come by. In many poor homes, they're nonexistent.

"Book reading really provides the words the children need to learn," said Susan Neuman, a childhood- and literacy-education researcher at New York University who served as the assistant education secretary under George W. Bush. "Frankly, when you and I talk to our children, we're talking in a baby-talk-like way—we're not using sophisticated language. But even a very low-level preschool book like a Dr. Seuss book has more sophisticated vocabulary than oral discourse. So it's really about the print gap and not the oral-word gap."

In 2001, Neuman co-authored a study that found that in a middle-class community in Philadelphia, each child had access to 13 books. In a community of concentrated poverty in the same city, on the other hand, there was only a single age-appropriate book per 300 kids—or about 33 titles total, all of which were coloring books. Now, she's out with a new study, published this month in the journal *Urban Education,* that helps paint a clearer picture of the nation's "book deserts," finding intense disparities in access to children's reading resources in Detroit, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C.—even between a very poor neighborhood and a slightly-less-poor one within a given city.

Neuman and her co-author on the new study, Naomi Moland, an assistant professor at Columbia University's Teachers College, walked and biked the streets of two neighborhoods in each of the aforementioned cities, meticulously combing each block for businesses selling print resources for kids of any age, including fiction and nonfiction books and newspapers. Overall, they found just 75 such stores—or about 2 percent of all the businesses in those neighborhoods—selling print resources for children ages 0 through 18; many of them were dollar stores. And especially after breaking down the data by neighborhood and age group, it became clear: Children's books are a rarity in high-poverty urban communities. The likelihood that a parent could find a book for purchase in these areas, Neuman and Moland write, "is very slim."

Take D.C.'s Anacostia neighborhood, where nearly all the population is black and 61 percent of children live in poverty. When the research was conducted in the summer of 2014, it didn't have a single store selling a book for preschoolers, and there were only five books available for kids in grades K-12. In other words, 830

children would have to share a single book in the impoverished Washington neighborhood. "Book stores in the U.S. are becoming a rare bird, but [in places like this], there are no bookstores at all," Neuman said. "How do you become literate when there are no available resources?"

The new study adds to a growing body of research demonstrating how income-based housing segregation undermines the prospects of America's youngest citizens, with the rich leaving "the poor and the near poor to scramble for resources that would have otherwise benefited a larger share of the population," Neuman and Moland write. But it also shows the nuanced ways in which poverty shapes the country's communities—how drastically access to something as basic as a book can change from one neighborhood to another just a short drive away. Neighborhoods with 40 percent or more of their residents living in poverty have grown at troubling rates in the last few decades, but so have areas known as "borderline" neighborhoods, in which 20 percent to 40 percent of people live in poverty.

Just a couple of miles north of Anacostia, for example, in the borderline Washington neighborhood known as Capitol Hill, Neuman and Moland found more than 2,000 children's print resources in stores—i.e., a book for every two kids. While still equipped with relatively few reading resources, the borderline neighborhoods the researchers studied, overall, had 16 times as many books as their high-poverty counterparts.

Equating access to books with access to stores that sell books is hardly perfect, but it makes a good deal of sense when considering the existing data on the book habits and day-to-day realities of low-income families. Statistically, poor families are far less likely to utilize public libraries, whether it's because they're not acclimated to using them or because they're worried about being charged late fines, or because they're skeptical of putting their name on a card associated with a government entity. Neuman has found that only 8 percent of such families report they have taken advantage of library resources.

Meanwhile, even though parents could in theory easily order books for their kids from online stores like Amazon, a perhaps surprising percentage of low-income families lack access to high-speed internet at home—a little over half of those with children under 8, according to a 2013 study. And only 61 percent of poor families with young children, according to the same study, have internet-enabled mobile

devices. That means the presence of brick-and-mortar stores where books are sold can be critical, especially during the summer months when poor children aren't in school and lose many of the academic skills they developed over the previous year.

As with exposure to vocabulary, access to books can have both immediate and longer-term impacts on a child's academic and socioeconomic outcomes. Living in a book desert "may seriously constrain young children's opportunities to come to school 'ready to learn,'" Neuman and Moland write. A lack of access to books may help explain why, according to some research, children from economically disadvantaged communities score 60 percent lower on kindergarten-readiness tests that assess kids' familiarity with knowledge as basic as sounds, colors, and numbers. And researchers say living in a book desert in one's early years can have psychological ripple effects: "When there are no books, or when there are so few that choice is not an option, book reading becomes an occasion and not a routine," they write.

According to Neuman, who, as the assistant education secretary under Bush, was in charge of implementing No Child Left Behind, the stalled achievement rates of the country's children show that more emphasis needs to be placed on what happens in their lives outside of schools. "We have seen that No Child Left Behind was an effort to really improve schools while ignoring parent education," she said. "What we realize is that children are out of school more than they're in it." Contrary to the conventional assumption that academic interventions can only happen in school, she continued, some of the most critical factors in kids' achievement involve family and environment.

Ultimately, giving kids access to books may be one of the most overlooked solutions to helping ensure kids attend school with the tools they need to succeed. As an experiment, Neuman and her team—with funding from JetBlue, which also helped fund her latest research—set up a vending machine in a busy area in Anacostia last summer where kids could pick up books for free. Within six weeks, according to Neuman, 27,000 books were given away. "It's designed to say to people, 'strike down that notion that these people don't care about their children'—they deeply care," she said. "What they lack are the resources to enable their children to be successful."

The Nutritional Value of Dessert Books:
Let Them Have Their Cake and Read It, Too!
By Annie Ward

One spring day, I dropped into a second grade classroom during reading workshop. Kids were hunkered down in reading spots, comfortably engrossed. Their teacher, an energetic newcomer to the district, came over and whispered apologetically, "I'm letting them read their library books." She explained that while she ordinarily prompts children to put library books directly in their cubbies, this time something had possessed her to let kids bring them into the classroom and read them right away. Wouldn't you know that would be the moment an administrator walked into the room?

After reassuring the teacher that I thought it was a splendid idea, I conferred with students about their choices. Mickey excitedly held up *High School Musical: The Essential Guide* and told me that she loves watching the show with her parents. When I confessed my ignorance, Mickey gave me a quick tour of the book, reciting favorite features of the DK compendium. "What are you thinking about as you read it this time?" I asked. "I'm working on script," Mickey replied. I assumed she was referring to a teleplay embedded in the book, but instead she pointed to a cursive heading alongside a photograph of the beloved character Jason Cross. "Because I know this is Jason," Mickey explained, "I can figure out the cursive letters."

Later, the teacher explained that she generally seeks to match kids with "just right" books within the reading workshop—mostly early chapter books—for independent practice. While she appreciates kids' passion for their library books, she fears that some, like the Star Wars Character Encyclopedia David had selected, are too dense or challenging and that others, like the joke book Vincent had picked, are too frivolous. She noted that some of her colleagues refer to selections at both ends of the complexity spectrum as "dessert books," ones students may enjoy after they finish their just-right main courses.

Since this conversation, I have been pondering the "dessert book" metaphor. It hinges on the presumption that some books, like their confectionary counterparts, lack nutritional value. If you enjoy them too much, they mustn't be good for you. I've noticed that alluring, non-narrative nonfiction texts are most frequently deemed "dessert books." Even when we don't use this particular term, we often tell children to set aside compendia, how-to books, joke books, atlases, and coffee table books until they have amassed enough eyes-on-print time in narrative texts.

These actions taken by diligent teachers are understandable. Our district seeks to close the knowing-doing gap around voluminous, high-success reading by ensuring that kids are well-matched each day with books they can read and want to read. Richard Allington (2012) defines volume as "the combination of time students spend reading plus the number of words they actually consume as they read." Accordingly, teachers carve out time for kids to read every day and earnestly channel them into accessible and continuous narrative texts in which to accrue the nourishing word count.

And yet. My own early reading history is rife with Red Sox baseball card stats, Seventeen magazines,

World Book Encyclopedias, Guinness Book of World Records, and adult coffee table books. During the energy crisis of the 1970's, my father shut off the heat in rooms we didn't use often, including our living room. After school most afternoons, I would grab a Ring-Ding from the fridge door, don my parka, venture into the chilly chamber, lie on the sofa, and pore over *The New Yorker Book of Cartoons* and *The Best of Life* until my mother called me for dinner. New Yorker cartoons fascinated me--particularly the racy ones--even though I didn't understand all the captions. In *The Best of Life*, Nick Ut's iconic photograph of a girl about my age fleeing a napalm attack provided a window into the war that I otherwise grasped only dimly via snippets overheard on television news.

This poring-over of highly intriguing, expository reading material piqued my curiosity, taught me about the world, and ultimately made me a more engaged and skillful reader. For sure, this type of reading differed from the way I processed narrative fiction books in school—plowing through linearly from cover to cover and digesting a lot of print along the way. But it was valuable nonetheless. In addition to the stream of "just-right" books from which I fished in school, I had access to a wild river of text at home because my parents had magazine subscriptions, a World Book Encyclopedia, and a coffee table piled with alluring tomes. What they didn't have was a need to micromanage my choices.

It seems to me that the healthiest approach to the conundrum of how closely to regulate a child's independent reading diet is to adopt an inquiry stance around his/her selections. Rather than act as a book warden, dismissing or postponing children's choices out of the gate, why not kid-watch, confer, and respectfully probe before assuming a book has limited nutritional value? Consider the following:

- The word "riveted" literally means "joined or fastened." When kids are riveted to a particular book and keep it close (perhaps checking it out of the library repeatedly as Mickey did), explore its allure. What draws the child to this book? What does she love about it?
- Does the book reward the child's background knowledge? Does it build new knowledge about a topic he finds irresistibly compelling?
- Knowledge is power, and surprising information about high-interest topics is social currency in the classroom. Does the book help the child become a maven in a niche that delights his peers? Scheuer and Beecher (2017) note that, "As children discover something interesting or even gross, they just need to share this discovery and call over a friend or two."
- Does the book foster curiosity and lead the child to seek additional information through texts and conversation? Scheuer and Beecher observe that, "As children get excited about a topic, they want to talk about it...Reading nonfiction collaboratively encourages children to spend more time with a book than they might have done on an individual level."

At the 2017 Scholastic Reading Summit in Seattle, Dav Pilkey cited his mother's loving acceptance of his unorthodox library book choices as the key to his development as a reader. As the covers of his picks flashed on the screen (*The Truth about Fonzie*, *Dynamite Magazine: Meet the Sweathogs*...), Dave

emphasized that, when it comes to a child's book choices, "Love is the key. Love leads to habits. Habits lead to skill." Dav closed his talk by asking why adults so often itch to take books out of kids' hands: "When it comes to kids' reading, there are no guilty pleasures."

Life is short; eat dessert books first now and then!

References:

Allington, Richard L. (2012). *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs, Third Edition*. Boston: Pearson.

Scheuer, Mary Ann and Beecher, Alyson (2017). "Beyond Reading Levels: Choosing Nonfiction for Developing Readers." *School Library Journal*, August.

Scholastic Reader Leader Blog:
https://bookfairs.scholastic.com/bookfairs/articles/nutritional-value-dessert-books.html

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CLASSROOM LIBRARY

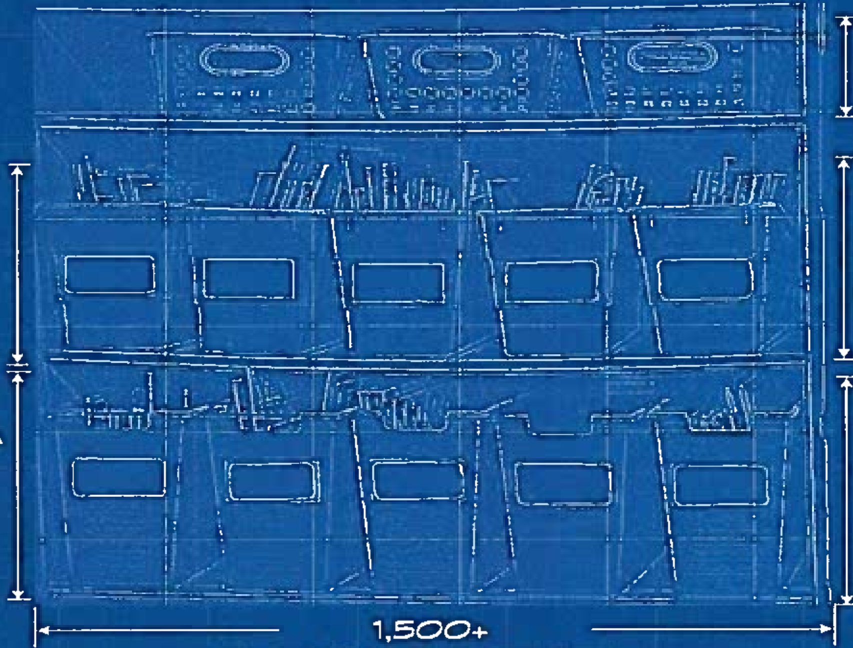
Build the collection for the readers you expect;
customize it for the readers you meet.

Range of Formats

- Anthology/bound set
- Chapter book
- Coffee table book
- Compendium
- Graphic novel
- How-to/procedural
- Interactive
- Magazine
- Picture Book
- Reference
- Series
- Wordless book

Variety of Genres

- Drama
- Fiction
  - Historical Fiction
  - Magical Realism
  - Mystery
  - Realistic Fiction
  - SciFi/Fantasy
  - Short Story
  - Traditional Tales
- Nonfiction
  - Biography
  - Expository
  - Narrative
- Poetry



Array of Topics

- Animals
- Forbidden/edgy
- Funny
- History
- Innovators
- Popular culture
- Science
- Sports
- Social issues
- Timely/local

Elements of Kid Appeal

- Amount of text
- Chapter length
- Illustrative support
- Interactivity
- Social acceptability
- Varied reading levels
- Effort-to-reward ratio

Additional Considerations

- Authenticity/accuracy
- Diverse characters/settings
- Layered characters/plot
- Open to interpretation/debate
- Subtlety
- Craft elements
- Clever/witty
- Critical acclaim

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