

# READING RESEARCH AND SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA PROGRAMS

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## Introduction

Historically, school libraries and reading have been synonymous. In the early years of school libraries, recreational reading was the major reason to have a school library. Early professional literature emphasized the role of the librarian as reader's advisor rather than the curricular role discussed today. School librarians prided themselves that they taught the love of reading and good literature to young people. They left the teaching of reading skills to the classroom teacher and the remedial reading teacher. Today, the traditional emphasis on reading in the elementary library media program is alive and well, and so it should be. But times have changed. Teachers of reading, textbook publishers, reading researchers, and state departments of education are shifting the emphasis of reading instruction from a skills-based curriculum to a literature-based one. The nation has realized that we have a generation of young people who can read but don't and who would usually choose most other recreational activities over reading (Wittrock, 1986).

Library media specialists should be extremely pleased when they realize that literature and reading programs are merging in many parts of the country. Opportunities for collaboration are plentiful. But do library media specialists know how to collaborate in a field once considered "their territory?" What do library media specialists know about the teaching of reading? What do teachers know about literature and how to motivate readers? The assumption of this paper is that whatever distance now exists needs to be bridged if we are to raise a generation of readers, who can and like to read.

This literature review first considers what the experts say should be taught to produce a generation of readers, and how reading should be taught. Implications for library media center programs are then discussed, and the paper ends with a discussion of some major research questions that might be addressed.

## What Should Be Taught

### The Goals

The English Coalition Conference, a remarkable group of professionals, has suggested that the type of students they would like to see emerging from the elementary classroom would include the following (Lloyd-Jones & Lunsford, 1989, pp. 3-5):

- That they be readers and writers, individuals who find pleasure and satisfaction in reading and writing and who make those activities an important part of their everyday lives, voluntarily engaging in reading and writing for their intrinsic social and personal values.
- That they use language to understand themselves and others and to make sense of their world, and as a means of reflecting on their lives; that they engage in such activities as telling and hearing stories, reading novels and poetry, and keeping journals.
- That they use oral and written language in all its varieties as a tool to perform tasks done, to take charge of their lives, to express their opinions, and to function as productive citizens. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening will, for example, help them succeed in the workplace and conduct other everyday activities such as shopping and paying bills. They will, among other things, write letters to editors, read newspapers, fill out forms, and speak persuasively.
- That they leave the classrooms as individuals who know how to read, write, speak, and listen effectively. As competent language users they will:
  - use prior knowledge to comprehend new oral or written texts;
  - possess a variety of strategies for dealing with unfamiliar words and meanings in texts;
  - respond personally to texts;
  - comprehend the literal messages in texts;
  - read and listen interpretively;
  - read and listen critically;
  - be able to write in a wide variety of forms for a wide variety of purposes and audiences;
  - be able to read varied types of texts, including poems, essays, stories, and expository texts in both print and electronic media;
  - make connections within texts and among texts;
  - use other readers' experiences with, responses to, and interpretations of texts;
  - be able to hear literature, appreciating its sounds and cadences.
- That they recognize when language is being used to manipulate, coerce, or control them, and that they and others around them use oral and written language, and learning how to describe these uses in terms of grammar, syntax, and rhetoric. In writing, they understand how to develop different pieces and what those pieces do. In reading, they notice and monitor their own reading processes and their purposes for reading. Self-evaluation is a key component of their oral and written language activities, one that leads to a sense of ownership of their language.

- That they will have an appreciation and respect for their own language and for the language and culture of others. They will understand enough about the dynamic nature of language, language change, and language variety to be open to and understanding of communications from people of linguistic and cultural groups different from their own. They will have had many opportunities, through reading literature from various cultural groups and interacting orally with a variety of people, to be able and willing to see the world from the perspectives of others. They will not only have a sense of the richness and distinctiveness of the life of particular cultural groups, but also a sense of common humanity.

Secondary school students should:

- use language effectively to create knowledge, meaning, and community in their lives;
- reflect on and evaluate their own language use;
- recognize and evaluate the ways in which others use language to affect them (Lloyd-Jones & Lunsford, 1989, p. 19).

### The Response of Research

A number of studies have been published regarding how well the children and young adults of the United States read (Anderson, 1985; Reading Report, 1985; Alvermann et al., 1987; Thimmesch, 1984; Two Reactions, 1989; Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986). Researchers tend to agree that the nation's children are not any better readers than their parents in spite of movements such as "back to basics." They can read routine and uncomplicated reading materials, but beyond this, the failure rate is much higher than our society would be thought to have. One study stated: "Our analyses of these findings lead us to conclude that we are not a nation of careful readers nor are we highly competent information processors. In an information age, these deficiencies of young adults should be viewed as particularly troublesome. Another major finding--that there are wide gaps between racial and ethnic groups in basic and middle-level literacy skills--also has political implications." (Venezky et al., 1987, pp. 29, 52).

Thousands of research studies have been conducted in the past 20 years searching for answers to questions such as: "How do children learn to read? What is the best method to teach reading?" Little research has been done on how young people learn to enjoy reading. (Spiegel, 1988, pp. 18-24).

Researchers have divided the process of reading into skills and subskills. For example, Calfee and Drum's model of reading suggests that readers develop in five stages:

1. learning to decode (letter sounds and pronunciation skills),
2. building vocabulary,

3. sentence comprehension,
4. paragraph comprehension,
5. text comprehension (Wittrock, 1986, p. 810).

Following these models, publishers have created basal reading series that concentrate on teaching skills and subskills. While the method has been somewhat successful, many have felt that a generation of readers exists who can read, but don't, because the process of learning to read is both painful and dull. Rigid basal instruction ignores the fact that "skilled readers are flexible and that how they read depends upon the complexity of the text, their familiarity with the topic, and their purpose for reading." (Anderson, 1985, p. 13).

In the late 1980s, attention focused on rejecting a skills-based reading program. (Two Reactions, 1989). Another popular method is one that embraces a whole language philosophy. Thus, we read such statements as: "It is probably a mistake to design an instructional program in which one component (e.g., decoding) becomes an unnecessary barrier to the acquisition of other components." (Wittrock, 1986, p. 813).

The California reading initiative is currently the most influential of the ideas of what and how reading should be taught. Its essential components include:

- Reading is attainable and pleasurable.
- The emphasis is on readers (students) not on reading (books).
- Learning to read is a means toward the goal of becoming a lifelong reader.
- Teachers model and inspire as well as teach.
- Parents are teachers, also. When they read aloud, listen to children read, and encourage reading, they enhance the learning process.
- Literature should be the core of the language arts curriculum.
- Books are treasures that should be accessible to all. (Cullinan, 1987, p. 151).

No matter the method, the advice from research tends to favor a phonics-based program in the early grades moving toward comprehension strategies as soon as possible (Anderson, 1985).

### Major Findings

1. In a well-designed reading program, mastering the parts does not become an end in itself, but a means to an end, and there is a proper balance between practice of the parts and practice of the whole. (Anderson, 1985, p. 17).
2. Reading must be seen as a part of a child's general language development and not as a discrete skill isolated from listening, speaking, and writing (Anderson, 1985, p. 20).



3. As proficiency develops, reading should be thought of not so much as a separate subject in school but as integral to learning literature, social studies, and science (Anderson, 1985, p. 61).
4. Teachers from all content areas should be reading teachers; not just elementary teachers and reading specialists (Dupuis, 1984).

### How Reading Should Be Taught

#### Decoding.

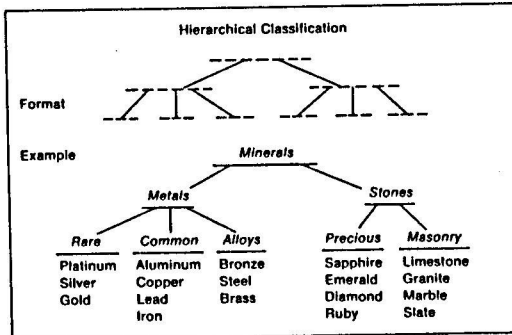
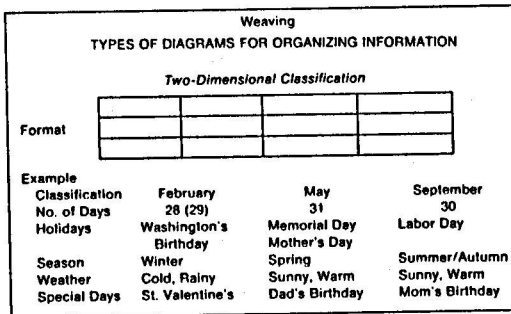
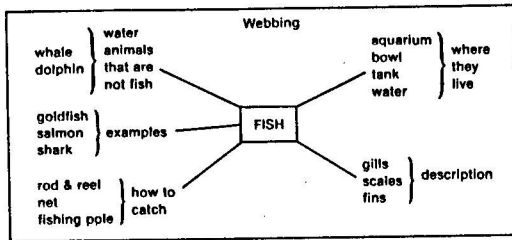
Decoding is most often taught through a drill and practice method of learning individual letter sounds and applying those sounds to words that follow the rules and then to words that are exceptions. A simple test of the effectiveness of decoding skills is to have a person read orally, measuring fluency as well as accuracy. Paper and pencil tests are less accurate (Witrock, 1986, p. 825). Research has questioned the value of round-robin reading groups in which the teacher corrects the reader's pronunciation of words. On the one hand, the reader might be helped, but on the other, equally likely is that the student's concentration on the meaning of the text is broken, and loss of attention can often be embarrassing (Witrock, 1986, p. 824).

#### Vocabulary.

Much attention has been focused on building vocabulary. Children come to school with a large oral vocabulary. Early vocabulary building methods try to convert this oral vocabulary into a print one and at the same time develop a sense of word meaning. Basal textbooks start with a narrow range, presenting lists of vocabulary words to learn and then providing reading passages to practice those words, both to develop decoding skills and vocabulary skills; thus the concentration on books and stories containing controlled vocabularies, and reading material "on your reading level" (Witrock, 1986, p. 828). As students progress, vocabulary is most often taught as a function of context, i.e., the student is assumed to infer word meaning from clues given in the context, although readers can often get by without figuring out a word's meaning (Witrock, 1986, p. 829).

The most common strategy to build vocabulary is to provide a list of vocabulary words to memorize and then require the student to be able to write sentences using the words properly. Such practices improve performance on vocabulary tests but are thought to have little effect on reading comprehension (Witrock, 1986, p. 831; Marzano & Marzano, 1988).

Another method of developing vocabulary concentrates on grouping words into clusters that are associated in some way (Marzano & Marzano, 1988). Three popular types of clustering include webbing, weaving, and hierarchical classification, as illustrated in the following diagrams:



(Wittrock, 1986, p. 827; Heimlich & Pittelman, 1986)

A third method of developing vocabulary is to study the structure of the English language, building knowledge of prefixes and suffixes, roots, and word origins. Students can then deduce word meaning by recognizing the subparts of words.

Comprehension.

Students are often asked the question "What happened?" as they first read sentences, then paragraphs, then chapters, then books. Another question is: "Who did what to whom and why?" (Wittrock, 1986, p. 836). To increase the amount of thinking, students are asked to summarize and draw conclusions, to question what they read, to clarify in their own minds what they have read, and to interpret and draw inferences from what they read (Wittrock, 1986, p. 839).

### A Longitudinal View

G. Robert Carlsen, a scholar who spent his career studying readers and writing one of the most used textbooks on young adult literature, summarized the conditions that discourage reading, from hundreds of interviews and written responses about reading. Below are some of his points (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988, pp. 151-155):

**Growing Up with Nonreaders.** Some young people grow up in families that don't read and don't value reading. Reading motivation comes from schools and libraries.

**Traumatic Learning Experiences.** Young people report negative and embarrassing experiences with teachers during reading skill instruction that negatively affect their attitude toward reading. The same negative experiences happen with librarians who restrict access to materials and make libraries less than appealing.

**Obstacles during the Teenage Years.** Extracurricular activities limit reading time as young people get older. At the same time, pressure to read the classics, an oftentimes unpleasant experience, increases.

**Educational Methodology.** Book reports are cited as the number one deterrent to reading by young people. The literary notebook or reading journal fared no better. Neither did extended literary analysis of a single work. Likewise, pressure to agree with critics' interpretation on literary meaning discourages young adult readers.

Here then are the conclusions that we have drawn from the more than one thousand reading autobiographies collected over nearly thirty years. The autobiographies preserve a record of how people remember their experiences with reading and books from their earliest years up through maturity. At times, the process may have a strange forward and backward movement. There are surprising accidents that make people readers; for others, there are just as many occurrences that keep them from becoming so. Efforts in the classroom that are designed to make young people readers were sometimes profitable and at other times detrimental. Perhaps the old farmer's comment, "I know how to farm twice as good as I do" might be applied to our teaching of reading: we know how to make readers out of people "twice as good as we do." The voices are clear and strong in articulating the direction that reading instructions should follow. The advertiser's injunction "Give me a person who reads" is but a modern echo of Bacon's statement, "Reading maketh a full man."

Other Major Findings

1. The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children (Anderson, 1985, p. 23; Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988, p. 7). There is no substitute for a teacher who reads children good stories. It whets the appetite of children for reading, and provides a model of skillful oral reading. It is a practice that should continue throughout the grades (Anderson, 1985, p. 51).
2. Children of every age and ability should be doing more extended silent reading (Anderson, 1985, p. 54; Spiegel, 1988, p. 8).
3. Children improve their reading ability by reading a lot (*What Works*, 1987, p. 8; Cullinan, 1987, p. 13; Spiegel, 1988, p. 7).
4. Telling young children stories can motivate them to read. Storytelling also introduces them to cultural values and literary traditions before they can read, write, and talk about stories by themselves (*What Works*, 1987, p. 23; Aiex, 1988).
5. Hearing good readers read and encouraging students repeatedly to read a passage aloud helps them become good readers (*What Works*, 1987, p. 36; Cullinan, 1987, p. 8).
6. Analyses of schools that have been successful in promoting independent reading suggest that one of the keys is ready access to books (Anderson, 1985, p. 78; Spiegel, 1988).
7. Summer reading programs contribute not only to enjoyment of reading but to retention of knowledge over vacation periods (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988, p. 16; Harmer, 1959).
8. The use of libraries enhances reading skills and encourages independent learning (*What Works*, 1987, p. 60).
9. The classroom environment should be filled with literature and opportunities to interact with it. Avid readers report access to a wide variety of reading materials as part of their development (Cullinan, 1987, p. 30; Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988, p. 149).
10. Gifts of books and book ownership seem to be important techniques in creating a pleasurable feeling connected with reading (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988, p. 13; Spiegel, 1988).
11. Parents play roles of inestimable importance in laying the foundation for learning to read (Anderson, 1985, p. 27; Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988, p. 146).

12. Reading motivation strategies complete with prizes often attract readers (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988, p. 11; Spiegel, 1988).
13. Efforts to make reading a pleasurable experience and an accepted practice among youth are major payoffs in encouraging reading (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988, pp. 13, 149; Spiegel, 1988).
14. Librarians who are competent reader's advisors are remembered fondly by avid readers (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988, pp. 148-149).
15. Teachers and librarians should be aware that books may produce intense personal experiences and reactions on the part of the reader (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988, p. 150).
16. The issue is no longer, as it was several decades ago, whether children should be taught phonics. The issues now are specific ones of just how it should be done (Anderson, 1985, p. 36; *What Works*, 1987, p. 19; Goodman, 1986).
17. Well-written materials will not do the job alone. Teachers must instruct students in strategies for extracting and organizing critical information from text (Anderson, 1985, p. 71).
18. Students experiencing stress in learning to read need to be able to set goals for themselves, learn how to apply the necessary skills to complete reading assignments successfully, and develop self-confidence as they master more and more reading skills (Gentile & McMillan, 1987, p. 26; Melton, 1988; Cook, 1988).
19. A good foundation in speaking and listening helps children become better readers (*What Works*, 1987, p. 12).
20. Comprehension is built when the teacher precedes the lesson with background information and follows it with discussion (*What Works*, 1987, p. 20; Carlsen & Sherrill, pp. 147-148; Goodman, 1986).
21. Students read more fluently and with greater understanding if they have knowledge of the world and their culture, past and present. Such knowledge and understanding is called cultural literacy (*What Works*, 1987, p. 71).
22. Computers can assist in learning to read, but only if the programs employed follow certain well-known guidelines common to other techniques of teaching reading (Strickland et al., 1987; Rasmussen, 1989; Reinking, 1987).

23. Linking reading and writing experiences builds both reading and writing competency (Cullinan, 1987, p. 45).
24. Techniques such as inferring character traits, recognizing story structure, inferring comparisons, distinguishing between fact and opinion/verifying authenticity, and recognizing the characteristics of a genre are useful in building comprehension (Cullinan, 1987, pp. 89-95; Beyer, 1987; Ruggiero, 1988).
25. Young people should be encouraged to develop their own interpretation of an author's meaning rather than search for the "right" interpretation (Spiegel, 1988, p. 8; Goodman, 1986).
26. Readers of all ages should be encouraged to develop the ability to understand words through context clues (Spiegel, 1988, pp. 14-15; Marzano & Marzano, 1988; Goodman, 1986).
27. A good story is an essential element in building comprehension skills (Cullinan, 1987, p. 2).
28. There is a fine line between using children's literature to teach reading skills and destroying the literature we use (Cullinan, 1987, p. 7; Pugh, 1988).
29. Books that have sequential plots and use repetitive sequences (are read repeatedly) help build reading skill (Cullinan, 1987, pp. 47-50).

#### Implications for Practitioners

Based upon the research findings, library media specialists can build powerful programs that mesh with the reading curriculum. A beginning list includes:

1. The amount read is critical.
  - a. Flood young people with reading materials.
  - b. Provide time to read, i.e., SSR, making reading something desirable when there is spare time.
  - c. Promote the amount read through contests, special events, individual goal setting, etc.
2. Listening to well-read stories promotes reading.
  - a. Learn to read out-loud effectively to young people, and do it often.
  - b. Use storytelling whenever possible.
  - c. Use tape recorded stories if they seem to help.
  - d. Create programs that encourage oral reading by teachers to students on a daily basis.

3. Parental involvement in reading helps.
  - a. Encourage parents to be role models: reading themselves, having reading materials easily available at home, talking about reading, etc.
  - b. Involve parents in reading motivational activities.
4. Read significant works.
  - a. Encourage reading the best of all genres, rather than the classics alone.
  - b. Encourage reading for pleasure.
  - c. Build analysis of literature.
  - d. Don't destroy interest in literature with over-analysis.
5. Explore values in literature.
  - a. Encourage the reading of good literature that explores values.
  - b. Discuss literature in various group sizes and settings.
6. Integrate reading with listening, speaking, and writing.
  - a. Create dramatic experiences with literature: choral speaking, reader's theater, dramatic productions.
  - b. Use literature as a springboard to writing in any curricular area.
  - c. Provide opportunities for young people to share literature orally with others.
7. Cause the reader to think as the reading takes place.
  - a. Discuss literature in various group configurations. Use both content oriented questions and questions that require interpretation and synthesis of what has been read.
  - b. Design one-on-one reading experiences with plenty of discussion both for analysis and enjoyment.
8. Start with phonics (decoding skills).
  - a. Assist early grade teachers in the phonics program effort by helping to create enjoyable activities involving word sounds through literature (alphabet books, books featuring word sounds).
  - b. Provide a plentiful supply of materials that stress sounds in a creative way.
9. All teachers should participate in a reading motivational program.
  - a. Organize, plot, encourage, build, push, and create motivational strategies that involve everyone in the school.
  - b. Analyze non-participation by some teachers and create strategies to encourage support.
10. Build comprehension.
  - a. Engage in discussion of literature.
  - b. Encourage choral reading.
  - c. Promote reader's theater.

- d. Experiment with debates.
  - e. Create any activity which has as its antecedent the understanding of written material.
11. Promote a diversity of genres.
    - a. Build a variety of literary genres into storytelling sessions, oral reading programs, motivational reading strategies, and curricular units.
  12. Over-the-summer (holiday or break) reading helps retain learning.
    - a. Sponsor a reading motivational program for summers or breaks.
    - b. Cooperate with public libraries in summer reading programs.
  13. Book ownership seems to encourage interest and value in reading.
    - a. Develop strategies to encourage book ownership such as RIF program, book sales, etc.
    - b. Encourage young people to write and "publish" their own writing.
  14. Provide alternatives to the ubiquitous book report.

#### Implications for Researchers

Much effort has been made in the past probing how children learn to read, but little on the factors needed to create lifelong readers: persons who use reading both as an information tool and as a tool for enjoyment. A major review of the literature, more thorough than the one presented here, needs to be done, looking for studies in the area of reading motivation, reading enjoyment, and longitudinal studies of adult readers looking for antecedents of success. Are there good techniques of measuring how much and what children and young adults read? Could these measures be used to look at the effects of reading motivation, storytelling, and reading aloud strategies? What is the impact of whole language and literature-based reading on reading skills, reading habits, and reading enjoyment? Documentation of successful strategies for library media specialist/teacher involvement in literature-based reading and whole language programs would be of value.

Someone should follow up on the work of G. Robert Carlsen with longitudinal studies that probe the various factors responsible for creating lifelong readers, particularly the role that libraries play, since Carlsen found a number of negative influences that libraries and librarians have on reading. For example, a study of programs in which students equate good reading with libraries and programs in which students don't perceive the library as a place to get good books would be enlightening. Researchers doing studies in the area of children's literature should make a link, where possible, between what is done in reading research and their own methodologies.



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