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Treasure Mountain IV

The Power of Reading: The Effect of Libraries and Reading Promotion on Reading Competence



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Treasure Mountain IV and IVa (both on the same topic) were held on June 15, 1993, in New Orleans, Louisiana, and on December 5, 1993, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Both conferences were underwritten by Harry Chan, president of Media Flex, Incorporated, and approximately 100 participants attended one or both of the presentations.

Practitioners had been asking for evidence that the school library media program does make a difference in the academic achievement of young people. The publication of two major works, *The Power of Reading* by Stephen Krashen (Libraries Unlimited, 1993) and *The Impact of School Library Media Centers on Academic Achievement* by Keith Curry Lance, Lynda Welborn, and Christine Hamilton-Pennell (Hi Willow Research and Publishing, 1993), began to attract wide attention across both the research and practitioner arenas. Treasure Mountain IV brought researchers and practitioners together to discuss these two studies, explore their meanings for practice, and to look at research possibilities to extend their findings.

The New Orleans group was led by Stephen Krashen, professor in the School of Education at the University of Southern California. He presented an overview of research findings on the impact of free voluntary reading on young people. That body of research supports the notion that free voluntary reading is the most significant factor contributing to advances in reading comprehension, spelling, vocabulary, grammar development, and writing style. The idea that free voluntary reading is more powerful than reading skills instruction was discussed at length, because the implications for library media centers is clear: What we have been doing to promote the love of reading since the beginning of our existence has been and will continue to be the backbone of our programs.

Dr. Krashen not only spent time discussing the past research and its methodology, but also had three doctoral students, Becky Constantino, Tom Cook, and Janice Pilgreen, present preliminary findings of their dissertation studies in the same area. Leroy Edwards from the Dayton, Ohio schools reported on the impact of a massive two-year reading initiative in the city schools. In addition, research models for examining the power of the Krashen study in both locally based research and formal research were explored.

A second major presenter in New Orleans was Keith Lance, Director, Library Research Service, State Library and Adult Education Office, Department of Education in Denver, Colorado. Lance gave a brief overview of the Colorado study, which examined the existence of library media programs, collections, and library media staff on the academic achievement of students at the elementary and secondary levels. The positive impact was great enough to more than substantiate the Mary Gaver research in New Jersey during the 1960s. Groups of participants planned with Lance to replicate this study in their own states.

Treasure Mountain IVa in New Jersey focused on a broader topic, asking if it is possible to measure the impact of the library media program not only on reading but also upon resource-based teaching and information literacy. Blanche Woolls and David Loertscher taught this day-long session. The agenda here was to concentrate on building a program in the school that would have a chance to make a major difference in one or all of the areas, and then to provide six different methods of locally based research to check the impact.

The two major research studies considered by both of these groups has provided the foundation for the project Count on Reading, which is a project of the American Association of School Librarians being planned and begun during the presidential year of Blanche Woolls. That program will encourage the nation's young people to read a billion books and will provide the research tools to local library media specialists to measure the impact of massive reading initiatives. Information about this massive project will no doubt receive further coverage in future school library literature.

The Treasure Mountain Research Retreats are loosely affiliated with the Research Committee of the American Association of School Librarians and provide opportunities at irregular intervals for researchers and practitioners of the field to discuss, plan, and understand one another's needs. Treasure Mountain V will reexamine the vision of what a library media program in a school should be as a prelude to the creation of a new set of guidelines for the field. This conference will be held in November 1994 in Indianapolis. To add your name to the Treasure Mountain mailing list, contact David V. Loertscher at P.O. Box 266, Castle Rock, CO 80104.