



Don't be satisfied with limited access policies of the present.

For Fluent Readers—Kindergarten Is Key

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For fifty years, teacher librarians have claimed to be the champions of reading in the elementary school.

Their jobs came into existence in 1963 when Dr. Mary Gaver from Rutgers University presented her research to Congress that reading scores in schools with centralized library collections and staffed by a teacher librarian made a significant difference. Thus, if a school cared about reading, the idea was that you would care about the library and a professional teacher librarian. Subsequent research by Keith Lance and others have demonstrated this impact on reading over the years.

However, as editors of *Teacher Librarian*, we were alarmed by the findings of Linda Johnson and Jean Donham in their study of library support of kindergarten readers and published in our journal in December of 2012.¹ While as Stephen Krashen has so clearly pointed out that the expectations for reading fluency have continued to rise over the years, access to books and reading materials is a central element if kindergarten children are going to be fluent readers by grade three. Yet, it appears that across the half century, 71 percent of teacher librarians were still providing kindergartners with only one book per week.

We know that one book a week does make some difference, but is it enough given the high stakes of literacy for today's children who must now compete globally? Is it enough to justify a professional teacher librarian's salary in the elementary school? Obviously, the downturn in school library jobs in the last few years is saying, we think, that whatever impact we have been making is not valued enough to sustain the idea that the library has a central and critical role in literacy.

Can teacher librarians exponentially increase access to books and reading materials? And, how do they make this happen when so many of their professional colleagues don't? We turned to two exceptional teacher librarians we know who adopted book bag programs with kindergartners to make this happen. Their experiences follow this introduction:

Williams, Keisa, "Let Them Go: Empty Shelves Means They're Reading!" pp 15.

Haupt, Sharon, "Kindergarten B.E.A.R. Bags," pp 18.

We chose these two teacher librarians because one worked in a middle class white community and the other in an inner-city Hispanic neighborhood. Their stories detail their successes, their methods, and the responses they received from teachers and parents.

Sadly, in both cases, when these two professionals left their positions, access to reading materials for kindergartners went right back to dismal! Why? That is a huge question for further analysis. However, we were interested in the idea that flooding kindergartners with reading materials is not only possible, but doable by professional teacher librarians and now the many paraprofessionals who hold library positions across North America. We suggest that you read these two accounts and think about ways that the library can move into a

central and critical role in literacy in your elementary school or across the elementary schools in your district, region, or state.

Johnson and Donham included in their article a number of questions teacher librarians need to ask themselves about access, access, and more access if young children are going to have the reading fluency they must have to succeed. We have a few other recommendations:

Start a conversation about access to reading materials with the reading leadership team in the school or district.

Don't be satisfied with limited access policies of the present.

Explore every method of increasing access to printed books, ebooks, books kids write, and every other format that you can imagine.

Start providing access to each individual child rather than making access policies for groups. Guarantee to administrators, teachers, and parents that each child will have maximum access.

Then figure out a way to make access happen.

Expand the notion of access to the printed book to the support of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. And, the expansion of that access from fiction to informational texts of all kinds and types.

As editors, we would like to hear from more teacher librarians who have demonstrated the maximization of access to reading materials and the opportunities that now abound for the youngest set not only to consume what others have created, but to write and create via many forms of technology their own work. Are we as a profession up to the challenge? It all starts with you.

¹ Johnson, Linda and Jean Donham. "Reading by Grade Three." *Teacher Librarian*, vol. 40, no. 2, December, 2012, p. 8-12