

Welcome to:

Count on Reading

• The Research •

Count on Reading: The Research is a project of the American Association of School Librarians that allows schools or organizations to test the power of reading initiatives. Do they really make a difference in academic achievement, reading comprehension, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and writing style? These differences were noted in a review of 100 years of reading research by Stephen Krashen in his book *The Power of Reading*.¹ Sometimes people will not believe a review of research—wondering if a similar impact would work in their community or school. This project encourages the replication of research to justify the tremendous effort often put into reading initiatives.

Who can participate?

Any school, public library, organization, or community group can participate.

What model action research studies might I use?

Adapt one or more of the following six models to your situation. If you are not experienced in conducting action research, you may want to solicit advice or guidance from a person in your local area who is.

Where else can I get advice?

The Research Committee of the American Association of School Librarians stands ready to offer advice to any school or library wishing to conduct research. Write Ken Haycock, School of Library Studies, 831-1956 Main Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1 who is the current chair of the research committee.

Suppose I would like additional training?

Training sessions for Count on Reading and the accompanying research projects will be given at the following times and locations:

American Library Association, Miami Conference, Summer, 1994 (check program)

AASL National Conference, Indianapolis, November, 1994 (check program)

Count on Reading National Teleconference, Oct. 8, 1994, (Dave Loertscher and Blanche Woolls as leaders) sponsored by Dan Barron, University of South Carolina College of Library and Information Science, Columbia, SC 29208
Write for details and site arrangements.

State training sessions will be conducted at some state conferences. Watch your mail and state association news.

Should I report my work?

Certainly. Reporting locally the results of your work is a must. The national committee of Count on Reading would also appreciate brief reports on your work. Send them to: David Loertscher, P.O. Box 266, Castle Rock, CO 80104.

What if I find negative results?

You may well get negative findings. These might stem from a number of problems. For example, the amount of reading done by those studies may not have been sufficient to see positive results. The groups that you compare might be different in some significant way. Natural growth in reading maturity by those not participating in reading initiatives might account for problems. Young people who say they read may not have.

¹ Krashen, Stephen. *The Power of Reading*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1993.

Your method of study might be faulty. It is important to try to find out why you got the results you did. You may learn some critical problems to avoid when repeating the study.

What should I do to prepare to study the impact of reading?

Alert: Make the Treatment as Strong as Possible! There are some aspects of any program which must be in place if a difference is to be guaranteed:

1. The amount read must increase and be maintained at a high level for 6-12 months at a minimum. Actual time spent reading is the key. Public libraries conducting summer reading programs of 3 months duration can only expect youth to maintain reading proficiency over that period and in some cases increase if the person hasn't been much of a reader before participating (however that is a great victory).

2. Youth who have not read much or who are learning English and who participate in a free voluntary reading initiative are likely to benefit the most. Avid readers will maintain their excellence but probably won't increase by leaps and bounds.

3. The main techniques to increase the amount read are:

a. Provide a print-rich environment (lots of easy access to a mountain of interesting reading material). Are there rotating classroom collections from the main library? Can students take home an unlimited number of books and exchange them daily? Are there attractive displays of books that can be checked out? Are paperbacks readily available? Are there trade shelves available? Are comic books available? Would youth report that there is something they'd like to read close by? Are homes stocked with reading materials? Are popular periodicals and newspapers available? Can they be checked out? Do you have a large collection of interesting and up-to-date books that youth will read? Current biographies? Sports books? Popular fiction? Thin books? Books for at-risk readers?

b. Read aloud to youth every day for a minimum of 15 minutes (K-12).

c. Provide sustained silent reading time (at home, at school, in the library). At least 30 min. per day would help.

d. Provide encouragement to readers (programs, initiatives, challenges, etc., but not necessarily prizes, food, etc.) What works is the criteria of choice here. And, what works today may not work tomorrow. Do computer programs help youth pick new titles to read? Do librarians help youth pick new books to read? Booktalks? Book discussions? Brown bag lunch discussions? Visits by famous people in the community/state/nation who talk and read books? Night of a Thousand Stars celebrations? Night camping in the library?

e. Try to make reading a pleasant experience (it's cool, discussions, a community of readers, heroes do it--so do we)

f. Participation by families will help.

4. It doesn't make a great difference what is read as long as reading happens. Starting with interests and building from there, is probably an important aspect of any program. Start with interests, gently challenge with quality.

Method One (Preliminary Study) Test the Theory for Yourself

One good way to get started is to test some of the national research conclusions in your own school or library using existing data and existing students.

Assumption: Avid readers (young people who read regularly and enjoy it) will score higher on achievement tests than students who don't read much or who can't read very well.

1. Compile a list of students (20 would be plenty for a trial) that you know are avid readers.
2. Get their test scores on reading comprehension or their overall achievement scores.
3. Average the scores.
4. Compare this average with the average for all students in the school. Is it higher? How much higher? High enough to brag about?
5. Share Your Findings: In your preliminary investigation(s), what did you find? Did you draw any conclusions? Did you gain any confidence to conduct a formal piece of action research?

Method Two Start with Individual Readers

Each student who gains the reading habit and becomes an avid readers is one more literate young person with a chance for success.

Try a pilot study

1. Within a group of young people to whom you have access, interview students, teachers, and parents. Rate each person along the continuums:

Seldom reads	1	2	3	4	5	Avid reader
Doesn't read well	1	2	3	4	5	Reads very well
Hates to read	1	2	3	4	5	Loves to read

2. Set up a model literate environment in cooperation with teachers and parents over an entire school year. Include easy access to reading materials, reading aloud, motivational strategies, SSR...etc.
3. Monitor progress with individual interviews every quarter, rating each student on the continuums.
4. What change is there over time? What techniques have produced the best results?
5. Examine failures carefully. What are the expressed problems? Underlying problems?
6. Publicize positive results. Seek input for improvement from many sources.
7. Use the pilot study to launch a larger program with a better chance of success. (don't forget the original pilot group - keep them going).

Institute a larger program/research study

1. Gain support from a wide variety of interested people to initiate a larger program/research study, the goal of which aims at individuals rather than groups.
2. Plan with the group the structure of a program that will be long-range, not a quick fix.
3. Plan ways to monitor success with individuals as opposed to group averages.
4. Plan a variety of approaches that will stimulate interest in reading over the long haul.
5. Carry out the program.
6. Build in monitoring checks on a regular basis and insist the that program evolve over time but not be deterred from its original intent.
7. How many individual avid readers are created? Maintained over time?
8. Share success stories and challenges with the Count on Reading Committee, parents, the community, the profession.

Method Three

Increasing the Amount Read and Declaring Success

Method: Create a reading initiative which results in more reading than previously done by the participants. Sustain this effort over time. Declare success based solely on the Krashen research. You might interview some participants in the initiative and ask them if they are enjoying reading more, what books they enjoyed, and whether they are willing to participate in the next phase of the initiative. Use these interviews in your news stories of the project. Report your project to Count on Reading.

Examples:

A sustained silent reading program is begun and lasts all year. A report for the local news and the school board describes the program laced with experiences from students and teachers who participated.

A public library goes into a preschool and starts a read-aloud program. Sometimes the staff of the preschool reads and sometimes the library staff comes and reads, but the read-aloud program happens every day. The staff and the librarians observe increased interest by the children in books and reading and report this to the community and to the Count on Reading national committee.

Four teachers in a school building did not participate in the read-aloud initiative last year. The school librarian convinces them to do so this year and helps choose some good books, participates when possible, and monitors progress. The 100% success rate is touted in PTA meeting. Benefits that have accrued (based on Krashen) are presented.

A school decides to purchase a computerized readers advisory program. The children are constantly at the computer getting suggestions on what to read next. Circulation triples. The librarian declares the project a success in the local news complete with quotes from the kids.

A group of teachers and librarians decided to abandon the reading text and use literature instead. They work all year to find great books the children will enjoy, create activities which increase the enjoyment of the literature, and create a "community of readers." After interviewing the children and parents, they realize and report the vast difference in reading purely from an enjoyment point of view (the skills have developed almost without effort, but that is only a minor part of why the program was changed).

Method Four

Push Reading, Measure Once, Compare against Expectations

Assumptions: Students who are tested are expected to progress one grade level each year on standardized tests of reading. The number or percentage of students at or above grade level is often of interest to teachers and parents. If you can use the results of a single reading test at the conclusion of a reading initiative (for example, the normal spring skill tests in the public schools), you can usually obtain the scores of how a group of students are doing in reading. For some reason, you may not have comparable test scores for the group of young people you are including in your reading initiative. In the affective area, you could assume that in a normal group of young people, the majority would not list reading as one of their preferred activities.

Method: Ask young people as they enter your reading initiative to fill out a general questionnaire about things they like to do in their spare time. They might rate television, sports, hangin' out, reading, etc.

Conduct your reading initiative.

At the conclusion of the initiative, administer a test of reading skills and a final questionnaire about things they like to do in their spare time. Do before and after interviews with a random sample of young people about use of leisure time.

Evaluative questions: How many students are at or above grade level in reading skill? What percentage of the students are at or above grade level in reading skill? How many young people rate reading higher on their list of things they like to do in their spare time? In student interviews, how many students mention reading during exit interviews as compared with those who mentioned it when they were interviewed the first time?

Examples:

A school has test scores for a new test only in 4th and 6th grades. The entire school participates in the reading initiative. The scores for 4th and 6th grades are examined to see if they are on grade level or above. Results are reported in the local news and in library periodicals.

The public school targets a group of at-risk readers for a special after-school or Saturday reading club. The public and school librarians ask and receive permission to examine the year-end school scores of the participating students to see if they are achieving grade level scores. A special Night of a Thousand Stars celebrates success.

The public library has access to a reading test. Students who sign up for a reading program can, as an option, take Form A of the reading test at the beginning of the program and Form B at the end of the program. What progress was made? More than expected?

A parent, Mrs. Johnson, is worried about Jane's progress in reading. After a planning session with school and public librarians, a special reading incentive/read-aloud/SSR program is designed around Jane's interests. Progress is monitored. Does she achieve expectations? Jane gets to have lunch with a celebrity (local/state/national).

A principal, implements a school-wide program of reading by challenging the whole school to read 50,000 books by year's end. A success would entail the principal spending a day on the roof of the school, kissing a pig, coming to school in his pajamas, etc. Reading scores are examined to check the percent of students at or above grade level.

Method Five

Push Reading, Measure, Compare Against Another Group

Assumptions: You may have access to reading scores of last year's 6th graders (any grade or all grades) but not for this year's 6th graders that they took at the end of the 5th grade. It may be too difficult to get individual scores for those in this year's 6th grade (kids move around, not enough time, too expensive, the school won't let you have access without major parent permissions, etc.) So all you may know is that the average 6th grader last year read at a 5.8 reading level; that is, they were below reading level slightly. You have no reason to suspect that this year's 6th graders are any different than last year's 6th graders. You also know that last year's 6th graders were encouraged to read about the same as they always had been, but that no extra special push on reading had occurred.

A second scenario might be two comparable schools in the same year. One school is going to participate in the reading initiative and the other school is not. Looking at last year's published scores for both schools, they don't differ very much from each other significantly (a judgment call, not a statistical test). One school becomes the experimental school and the other, the control school. Teachers and librarians in the control school can encourage reading just as they have done in the past. A major reading initiative will be conducted in the experimental school.

Method: Before the reading initiative, conduct random interviews of young people in the two schools about the use of their leisure time. Obtain reading scores for last year's 6th graders or last years students in both schools.

Conduct the reading initiative in one school but not the other.

Obtain reading scores for this year's 6th graders or for students in both schools.

Conduct an exit interview with the same students in both schools about the use of leisure time. If you are doing the 6th graders, you will only have one group's response to this interview.

Evaluative questions: How does this year's 6th graders perform on reading skill tests as compared with last year's 6th graders? (at least as good or better?). How does the experimental school perform on reading skill tests as compared with the control school? (at least as good or better?). How many young people rate reading higher on their list of things they like to do in their spare time in the experimental school vs. the control school? In student interviews, how many students mention reading during exit interviews as compared with those who mentioned it when they were interviewed the first time? (this year's 6th graders only)

Examples:

Of the three 2nd grade classes, two teachers participate in reading aloud and sustained silent reading programs every day for an entire year. There is no reason to suspect that the classes differ significantly from each other at the beginning of the school year. All classes participate in a reading initiative program. The scores of students at the end of the year are compared. Any differences?

One school district creates a massive reading initiative project. A comparative district does not. After a complete year, scores for the district as a whole are compared.

In a rural community the public library send a thousand books to add to the school library collection for one year to support a massive reading initiative. They also supply storytellers, programs and other support for the initiative. Scores for the school are compared with scores from another school which did not receive the help from the public library.

Method Six

A Formal Reading Research Study

The design of a formal reading study that has true random samples, highly controlled reading initiatives, a true control group, and comparable reading tests and scores requires research design expertise, statistical advice, and professional data analysis. We suggest that public and school librarians find research groups or professors at local or state institutions who would be willing to provide such expertise. Major funding for such research is not a prerequisite for a quality study. Results of such studies should be reported in local, state, and national publications and reported to Count on Reading